



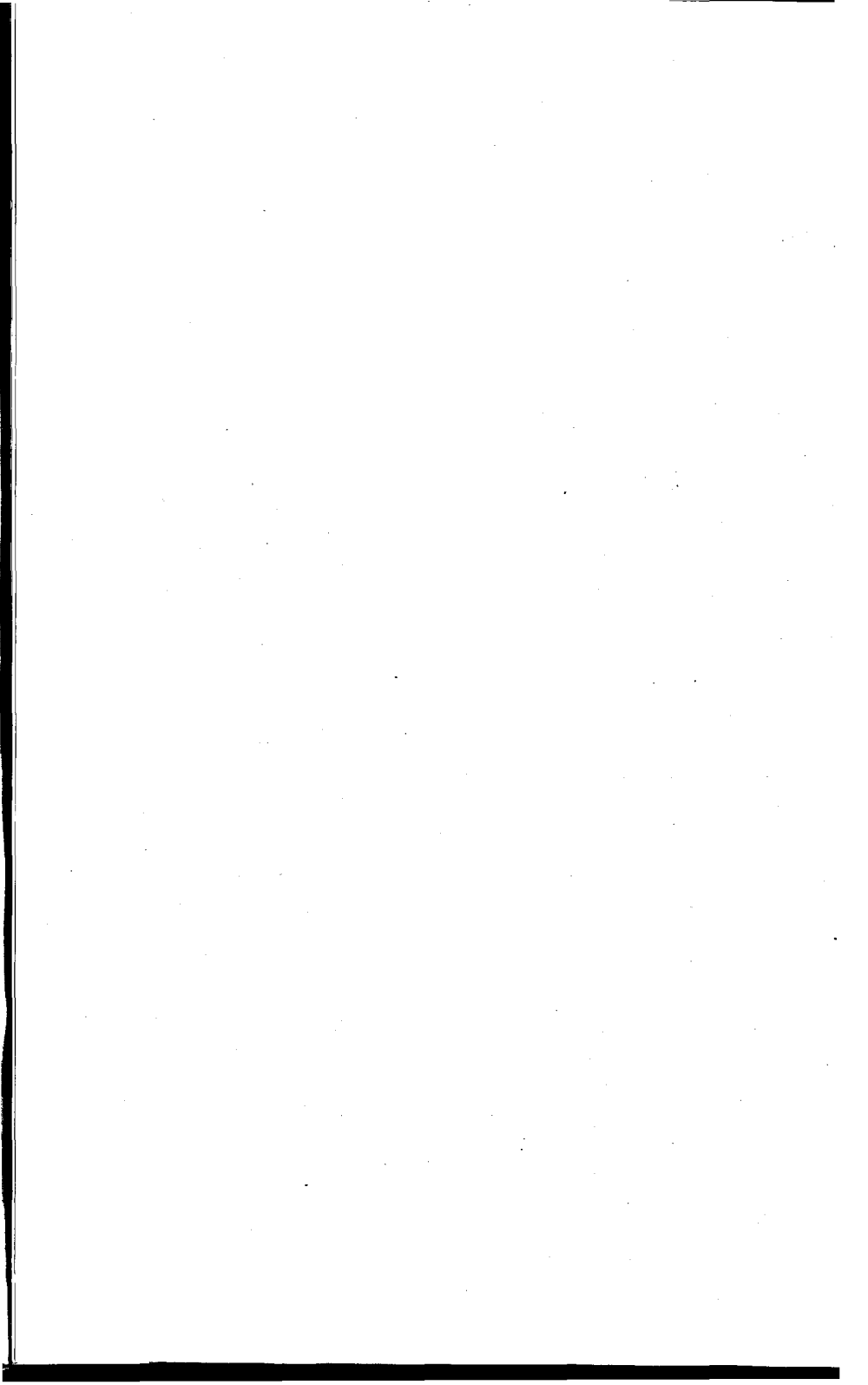
# HADĪTH AND SUNNAH —IDEALS AND REALITIES—

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A short biographical sketch of the contributors have been given on pages ix and x. We are particularly grateful to these scholars and pray Allah s.w.t. reward them all for their services to Islam.



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## INTRODUCTION

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"And if all Hadīth is given up, what remains but a yawning chasm of fourteen centuries between us and the Prophet? And in the vacuity of this chasm not only must the Qur'an slip from our fingers under our subjective whims — for the only thing that anchors it is the Prophetic *activity* itself — but even the very existence and integrity of the Qur'an and, indeed, the existence of the Prophet himself become an unwarranted myth."

In these words, the late Dr. Fazlur Rahman, one of the most energetic and productive minds of our time, succinctly put the case for Hadīth. Only a dishonest or insane person will deny the importance of Hadīth in its continuing role to guarantee the social, political, and cultural integrity of the *Ummah*.

It is a fact that we have among us a number of groups quite confused about the true place of Hadīth in Islam. The group known as anti-Hadīth argues that all Hadīth are fabricated, largely in the third century of Islam and that the Qur'an *alone* is the source of Guidance for Muslims. Without any grounding either in scholarship or insight, they sometimes tell us that the Hadīth is unreliable as guide to the Prophetic Sunnah. At other times we are naïvely told that Hadīth may be history, but it has no *Shari'ah* normativeness i.e., even if Hadīth is genuine, it contains no Sunnah for us. Subjectively selecting few Hadīths which appear to contradict the Qur'an, they use them to claim that Hadīth is opposed to the Qur'an and they are obliged to follow only the Qur'an.

The case of another anti-Hadīth group, which is of recent

origin, is even more pathetic. In their anxiety to clear the way, they resort to methods much more questionable than Nero's method of rebuilding Rome. They exhibit a singular lack of clarity of issues and a dismal ignorance of the role of the Prophet s.a.w. himself. In their anxiety to be accepted by the Ummah, they swear by the Qur'an to an Iblisian *tawhīd* — as Iqbal put it — and reject the second *shahādah*, 'Muḥammadun Rasūlullāh' on the ground it is *shirk* to mention Muhammad together with Allah (*sic*). This mental aberration for which there is no effective cure, probably results from their frustration with the extreme conservative attitude of some of the Muslims who have a tendency to quote even some of the weakest of Hadīth to defend their customs and practices which may have nothing to do with the Prophet or his practices. The problem is compounded also by the illiterate religious functionaries of the Muslim world who interpret the Hadīth literally, without understanding the purpose or context of the Hadīth, and as a result distort the religion itself.

To understand the importance of Hadīth, we should look at the Qur'an first. The key to understanding it is the way it was revealed. It came to a particular human being, Muhammad s.a.w. over a period of 23 years. Its verses must first be understood in their particular context in which they were revealed before one can go on to discover their general and universal significance.

Muhammad s.a.w. lived the verses of the Qur'an. In the words of *Umm al-Mu'minīn* 'Ā'ishah (r.a.), he was the living Qur'an. The Qur'an itself describes for us the example of the Prophet as the excellent role model for all time to come:

*Surely you have in the Messenger of Allah the pattern of excellence [uswatun hasanah] for anyone whose hope is in Allah and the Last Day and who remembers Allah much (33:21).*

This *uswah* or pattern is available to us in the Hadīth. Without the Hadīth we would be deprived of that example which, through the centuries, has guided Muslims towards excellence. All that is best in the daily life of Muslims today, and which unifies them in one Islamic culture, from Morocco to Indonesia, comes from the still

visible light of the *uswah* of Muhammad s.a.w.

The relationship between believers and the Prophet is a very close, personal one of love, devotion, respect and obedience. "The Prophet is closer to the believers than their own selves, and his wives are their mothers" (Qur'an, 33:6). Without the Hadīth this close relationship would not exist because it is the Hadīth which gives us a glimpse of the lives of Holy Prophet and his family, and the material for day-to-day living.

*Allah did confer a great favour on the believers when He sent among them a messenger from among themselves, rehearsing unto them the Signs of Allah, purifying them and instructing them in the Book and in Wisdom [hikmah], while before that they had been in error manifest (Qur'an, 3:164)*

A key function of the Prophet was not only to pass on the verses of the Qur'an but also to show Muslims how the Qur'an is to be applied to human existence. The wisdom (*hikmah*) spoken above, this process of purification and this instruction in the meaning of the Qur'an, are available to us in the Sunnah through the Hadīth. Even the basic forms of worship, like the details of the five daily prayers, the percentages of *zakāt* and the rules of fasting in their application would not have been known to us without the Hadīth. Without the *hikmah* the Qur'an would have been at the mercy of all who wished to misinterpret it.

The most serious error in understanding Islam is made by those who believe that the Qur'an *alone* is the source of Islamic Law. Undoubtedly the Qur'an is the basis of Islamic Law. But it has to be interpreted by the one to whom the Qur'an was revealed. About this role of the Prophet, the Qur'an itself says quite unambiguously:

*O ye who believe, obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those charged with authority from among you. If you differ in anything among yourselves, refer it to Allah and His Messenger if you believe in Allah and the Last Day; that is best and most suitable for final determination (4:59).*



Islam obviously is incomplete without obeying the Prophet.

The Messenger received the Qur'an and passed it on to humanity and, other than the Qur'an, his actions and words (recorded in the Hadīth) were also divinely inspired. His judgements and teachings were all guided by Allah. All the messengers of God were sent as the leaders of humanity to be obeyed and this is especially true of Muḥammad s.a.w.

*We sent not a Messenger but to be obeyed... But no, by the Lord, they can have no Faith until they make thee judge in all disputes between them, and find in their souls no resistance against thy decisions, but accept them with the fullest conviction (Qur'an, 4:64-65).*

The Companions (*Sahābah*) loved the Prophet more than their own selves. Each word and action of the Prophet was important for them and they took great care to remember it. They reflected on it and passed it on to others who had not heard of it. There were *Sahābah* who took turns to earn their living so that one out of two would be in the presence of the Prophet while the other was away earning his living. There were others who spent all their time in the presence of the Prophet and suffered near starvation in doing so.

Reliable evidence is available to show that the Hadīth of the Prophet began to be written down while the Prophet was still alive. But we should remember that Arabia had a strong verbal tradition, as attested to by the poetry and genealogical stories of the Arabs before Islam. The development of retentive memories was part of the Arab way of life. The prodigious memory-capacities of the Arabs served the cause of Hadīth when it was not written down.

Even now in cultures where the verbal tradition is dominant (for instance in tribal societies,) very insignificant incidents which occurred hundreds of years ago are passed on from generation to generation with remarkably little change in the narration's content. It is not easy for people living in a culture where the print and pictorial tradition are dominant, as in our modern environment, to understand such a tradition.

## Sense of sacred mission

The motives of *Sahabah* (Companions of the Prophet) in narrating the Hadīth were mainly to pass on to future generations what they themselves had seen and experienced of the excellent example (*uswatun hasanah*) of the Prophet. These motives were restrained and put in fine tension by the repeated warning of the Holy Prophet that "he who deliberately reports lies about me, shall prepare his seat in the Fire".

These motivation shaped the behaviour of *Ṣahābah* in various ways. Some were over cautious in reporting anything from the Prophet, while others spent their time telling and talking of the Prophet. In all cases they acted with a sense of sacred mission as far as transmission of the words of the Prophet was concerned.

## The generation of the *Ṣahābah*

The last of the Companions (those who have seen or met the Prophet) died in the year 110 after the Hijrah. Within that period of time Islam reached out with a speed unmatched in human history, westward from Arabia to Morocco and Spain, eastwards to India and China, northwards into Central Asia and southwards into Central Africa. People by the millions entered into the fold of Islam as empires and kingdoms crumbled.

The new Muslims wanted to know everything about the man to whom the Qur'an had been revealed. They had direct access either to the Companions who had seen or met the Prophet or to the *tābi'ūn*, the second generation of Muslims who had met and learned from the Companions. Thus knowledge of Hadīth became the key to the understanding of the new way of life — Islam — and the Companions were surrounded by young people, both men and women eager to be their students.

The longer the Companions of the Prophet lived, the more people they reached; and naturally, the quality of the Hadīth reported by them would depend on the closeness and depth of the contact they had with the Prophet.

Some of the Companions of the Prophet who were very prominent but passed away early, like Abū Bakr (r.a.), or were martyred within the first three decades after the Prophet, like 'Umar, 'Uthmān and 'Alī (r.a.), narrated few Hadīths. The reason was that their energies and time were taken up in administering and organising the newly established Islamic governmental system. Their energies, in the cases of Abū Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthmān were also taken up in fighting and destroying the two most powerful empires of their time, the Persian and the Roman. Thus they did not have the time to sit relaxed among the surging crowds of new Muslims and answer their questions about the way of life of the Holy Prophet.

Secondly, within the time of Abū Bakr, 'Umar and the first 10 years of 'Uthmān, the Islamic community was solidly established according to the model community in Madīnah. There had been no interruption in the flow of the Islamic way of life. Thus, at that time, the example of the Prophet was available in its pristine purity in day-to-day reality but with the resurgence of Arab tribalism, the model community passed away.

In the new circumstances of fratricide, leading to monarchy and the establishment of Ummayyad, and later, 'Abbāsīd, autocracy, the Muslims sought out the Companions of the Prophet and *tābi-ut-tābi'in* (Followers of the Followers), whose numbers were getting lesser and lesser, and learned from them. That is why the narrations of the Hadīth from *Sahābah* like Abū Hurayrah, 'Abdullāh b. 'Umar, 'Abdullāh b. 'Abbās, 'Ā'ishah and 'Abdullāh b. Mas'ūd (Allah be pleased with them) are many more than those from the *khulafā'i rāshidūn*.

### The fabrication of Hadīth: causes and motives

Any good thing will be imitated and faked and the case of Hadīth was not different. But just because fakes are circulated it does not mean that the genuine ones have altogether disappeared.

The basic cause for the fabrication of Hadīth was a paradoxical one: the strong love of believers for the Holy Prophet was recognised as unassailable by the forces of evil. The fabricators knew

that they could get the Muslims to follow false ideas only if the ideas were presented in the garb of Hadīth.

Islam has always been the greatest sources of resistance to tyranny. Hadīth was fabricated to soften this resistance. In this category come Hadīths which urge Muslims to obey their rulers unconditionally (or as long as they pray or lead prayers!). Some of these fabrications were futuristic and purported to report the coming of the 'Abbāsīd. Thus anti-Islamic forces who were unable to fight Islam openly took to fabrications of Hadīth to sow confusion and timidity among the Muslims.

Other Hadīths were fabricated to support or condemn sects. Large numbers of Hadīths were put into circulation to magnify the personality of 'Alī (r.a.) while during the time of Mu'āwiyah order was issued forbidding Hadīths from Imam 'Alī; Hadīths were circulated to condemn or de-emphasise the role of 'Ā'ishah (r.a.) and also that of women in general.

Tribal and racial loyalties also entered into fabrication of Hadīth. Reports were concocted and circulated extolling the Arabs, the Quraysh, the rulers of Damascus, and various tribes.

Attempts at misguided piety also led to fabrication. Hadīth promising tremendous rewards for minor good deeds fall in this category. Many of these minor good deeds were given a place even higher than that given to martyrdom in Islam.

### The Islamic response

The '*ulamā*' (scholars) of Islam (may Allah reward them) answered the challenge of Hadīth fabrication with a level of study, investigation and hard work which will be remembered for ever with pride and thankfulness in the history of Islam. Owing to their efforts the damage due to Hadīth fabrication was nullified to a very great degree. Hadīth could still be fabricated and spread but to anyone who wanted to know the genuine teachings of the Holy Prophet, there was no longer a serious problem.

The scholars of Hadīth known as *muhaddithūn* spent their lives in checking the genuineness of Hadīth and in getting rid of the

fabrications. They studied the chain of narration of each ḥadīth to check its origin from the Prophet via a *Sahābī* (Companion) or a *tābi'ī* (follower) who had met a *Sahābī*. Great scholars of Ḥadīth like Imam al-Bukhārī visited the narrators of Ḥadīth to get the Ḥadīth directly from them, even if they had to travel a thousand miles by the primitive means of travel then available.

The scholars of Ḥadīth were independent people and refused to become the servants of any government. Imam Mālik refused Caliph Abū Ja'far's suggestion that he (Imam Mālik) write a book which may be promulgated as the law of the state all over the Islamic world. He was even physically beaten by order of the Governor of Madīnah, Ja'far b. Sulaymān, because one of his *fatwas* was regarded as a move against the authorities. Scholars like al-Bukhārī went through periods of actual starvation in their determination to remain independent.

A major achievement of these scholars was the compilation of entire books containing brief biographies of the intermediate and final narrators of Ḥadīth. In these books known as *Asmā' al-Rijāl* (lit. 'the names of men'), the character of the narrators was summed up and pointedly mentioned. Hence the Ḥadīths of those known as liars, poor of memory, weak in details, given to elaborations of their own, or subject to other vices of character or integrity or ability, or those who had never met the ones they narrated from, were rejected. Owing to the independence and integrity of the *muhaddithūn* the people implicitly accepted their version of the chain of narration (*Isnād*) and the character of the narrators.

One of the peculiarities of Ḥadīth literature is that it is an uncensored version of the Companions' *understanding* and memory of the Prophet. The scholars of Ḥadīth did not look critically at the text of the reports they collected. If they were sure of its *Isnād* and of the character of its narrators they included it in their compilation. Sometimes they would show their understanding of the Ḥadīth by the order or arrangement they used by the headlines they gave to their chapters (as al-Bukhārī has done) or made notes about the quality or disqualification of a narrator (as Tirmidhī has done) but they left the text largely untouched.

It was the task of the *fuqahā'* (scholars of Islamic law) to look at the Hadīths critically and apply them to the needs of their times. Otherwise, great harm can be done to Islam by picking up Hadīths at random from books of Hadīth and trying to apply them without proper study and understanding to any situation.

By striking at the Hadīths, and by depicting them as quaint stories or lumping them all with the fabrications which did take place, the pseudo-intellectuals are actually striking, indirectly, at the Qur'an itself. Already we find translations of the Qur'an in which the arrangement of *Sūrah's* has been replaced by arrangements according to chronology of revelation; and also Qur'an in vernacular translated from another language, for example Qur'an in Malay translated from English.

### Understanding the Qur'an and the Hadīth together

One who wishes to understand Islam must learn to give up random sampling and out-of-the-context discussions. Islamic studies have suffered tremendously from the efforts of those who have a limited ideological vision and a narrow view of the process of understanding the texts of Islam. They pick up a verse from here, a sentence from there, and build their entire thesis on it. For instance the *kuffār* (unbelievers) pick up a verse about armed struggle (*qitāl*) and claim that Islam teaches its followers to kill all non-Muslims! Others pick up verses about *ribā* (interest) and concentrate on them totally out of context. As a result we see 'Islamic banks' being set up making a mockery of even the basic tenets of Islamic economics.

### Time span of Revelation

The Qur'an was revealed over period of 23 years of struggle by the Holy Prophet s.a.w. and the *Sahābah* (with whom Allah is well pleased). It was during this time the greatest revolution humanity has ever known took place. Allah, in the Qur'an, has emphasised the great wisdom of this process of Revelation (and revolution). Allah says:

*Those who reject faith say: "Why is the Qur'an not revealed to him all at once?" Thus it is revealed that We may strengthen thy heart thereby, and We have rehearsed it to thee in slow, well-arranged stages, gradually (25:32).*

*By degrees shall We teach thee to declare (the Message), so that you shall not forget (87:6).*

No wonder, the Qur'an is difficult for those who are unaware of how the Islamic movement proceeds at the grassroots levels of humanity. A correct understanding of the Qur'an is not possible without a good understanding of the struggle in which the Prophet was the key figure. As the Qur'an was revealed and implemented in real life, a tribal society transformed itself into a model universal community.

The Hadīth relates to the same time span as the Qur'an. If a Hadīth relates to the Makkan period, or to the early stages of Islamic society in Madīnah, it should not be taken as the final statement on the subject if there are other Hadīths on the same subject relating to the final days of the Prophet's struggle in Madīnah. This understanding can help clear considerable confusion which is caused by people who take Hadīths at random or those who take Hadīths from the early period as final statements.

These in summary are the issues dealt with in this book. The essays comprising this book were selected to serve a long felt need for a comprehensive collection of writings on various aspects of Hadīth and Sunnah for the non-academic reader. These essays were written by eminent Muslim scholars over a period of four decades and published in various scholarly Islamic journals, many of them inaccessible now to the ordinary readers. It is our hope that by bringing them together in one volume, the book will serve the readers to get a holistic picture of the true role of Hadīth and Sunnah as an integral part of Islam and the Islamic *Shari'ah*. It is this traditional Muslim view that we have sought to present here.

The book is divided into three parts. Part I deals with the origin and development of Hadīth, a topic the ordinary reader may find too

academic. However, we have included in this part only those writings which have been written in a language fairly simple and readable and considered essential for a better understanding and appreciation of the significance of Hadīth in general and its relevance to modern world. The copious endnotes provided in this part, we hope, will help the reader, if he wishes to pursue his studies further to appreciate the scientific and historical bases of *'Ulūm al-Hadīth*, the Sciences of Hadīth.

Part II is the main focus of the book. This part discusses in some detail the continuing role of Hadīth in maintaining the legal, social and cultural integrity of the Ummah; in this part we also examine the methodology to a "recourse to the Qur'an and Sunnah in order to get from there an understanding of and guidance for solving our new problems." Dr. Fazlur Rahman, for example, in his papers suggests some guiding lines from the early history of the Community when the Qur'anic teaching and the Prophetic Sunnah were creatively elaborated and interpreted to meet the new factors and impacts upon Muslim Society into the 'living Sunnah'. This should not be confused "with empty liberalism or negative spiritualism that seeks to drive a wedge between the form and the essence and says what matters is the essence and that the form is at best its cumbersome companion." This is further elaborated by Dr. S.M. Yusuf in his paper in chapter 8. The other papers in this part will, we believe, collectively answer the dubious arguments advanced by the orientalist and their disciples in the Muslim world in their efforts to cast doubts on the genuineness of the entire corpus of Hadīth.

The Prophet's sayings and doings, the minute details of his everyday life, provide us with the means of realising the inner reality, the gist and spirit of the Islamic system of beliefs and observances. The blessed Prophet gave to mankind a new scripture and bestowed upon it a new knowledge, a new spirit of self effacement and solitude for the Hereafter, a new ideal of contentment and contemptuous disregard of worldly goods and glory, a new joy of worship, repentance and supplication. This spiritual dimension of Sunnah is very important to the believers who "looketh unto Allah



and the last day and remember Allah much". This aspect of the Sunnah is the main theme of Part Three of this book.

Each part of the book is a complete study in itself. In fact each chapter of the book is a complete essay and can be read independently of other chapters. For this reason some repetition was unavoidable.

The system of transliteration of Arabic words adopted in this book is generally the same as has been employed in standard Islamic publications. However, in international words and names, such as Islam, Qur'an, Hajj etc., we have used the spelling ordinarily current in the English language. And also the salutation to the Holy Prophet in the words *sallallāhu 'alayhi wasallam* after his name, and the invocation *radiyallahu 'anhu* after the names of his companions are omitted in print in order to accommodate the text to the English language. They should, nevertheless, be understood as repeated in each case.

P.K.K.

Kuala Lumpur  
March 12, 1996  
Shawāl 22, 1416 AH.

**PART ONE**  
**HADĪTH:**  
**ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT**

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# HADĪTH — A SUBJECT OF KEEN INTEREST

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## The significance of Hadīth

The word *hadīth* primarily means 'new'. It is used as opposed to *qadīm* which means 'old'. From this followed the use of the term for a piece of news, a tale, a story or a report — be it historical or legendary, true or false, relating to the present or to the past immediate or remote. In this sense the word has been used by the pre-Islamic poets, and in the Qur'an and the Tradition of the Prophet. The story-tellers also were called *huddāth*.

This general connotation of the word *hadīth* has, like that of many other words (e.g. *salāt*, *sujūd*, *rukū'*, *zakāt*, etc.), been changed under the far-reaching influence of Islam. The Muslims since the very life-time of the Prophet called the reports with regard to his sayings and doings the best Hadīth, and by and by its use was confined to the reports of the Prophet's words and deeds only.

The Prophet himself as well as his immediate followers have used it in this sense more than once. When the Prophet said to Abū Hurayrah that he knew his anxiety about the Hadīth<sup>1</sup>, he did not mean but his *own* Hadīth. 'Utbah referred to this kind of Hadīth only

when he said that Ibn 'Abbās related only two or three Ḥadīths in a month.<sup>2</sup> 'Umar I did not mean but the Ḥadīth<sup>3</sup> of the Prophet when he asked his friends not to relate too many Ḥadīths.<sup>4</sup> When 'Alī said: "If you write the Ḥadīth write it with the *Isnād*," he meant the Ḥadīth of the Prophet only.<sup>5</sup>

### **Ḥadīth and Sunnah**

With this significance of the word Ḥadīth is very closely connected the connotation of the word *sunnah* which originally meant 'precedent' and 'custom'<sup>6</sup> and which has been used by the Muslims for the doings and practices of the Prophet only. Some of the Muslim writers, as Goldziher says,<sup>7</sup> have completely identified the significance of these two philologically unconnected words; others have drawn a line of distinction between their connotations. But the distinction between them is only theoretical, as has been pointed out by him.

### **Ḥadīth — a subject of keen interest**

The Ḥadīth in this sense — i.e., the report of the sayings and the doings of the Prophet — has been a subject of keen interest among the Muslims since the very life-time of the Prophet himself. His remarkable, stirring career could not have failed to draw the serious attention of his people. Having lived forty years of quiet, almost uneventful life, he started one of the most stirring and the greatest movements which influenced all the various aspects of human thought and life for all times, and he achieved his objective with astounding success. At the very beginning of his life as a prophet he struck at the very root of the firm beliefs and the long-established customs of the pagan Arabs. They hated and boycotted him, insulted and injured him, and compelled him to leave his home and hearth for a distant town. But he, by his implicit faith in his cause, his tenacity of purpose and his never failing zeal for his mission within ten years from his exile, destroyed the established prestige of the Quraysh of Makkah, shook the foundations of the pagan customs and the heathen

beliefs of the Arabs, humbled down their boastful tribal chiefs, persuaded the Christians of Najrān to come to terms with him, demolished the strongholds of the Jews in Arabia, and founded a theocracy which was destined to measure sword simultaneously and successfully with the tremendous, well-equipped and trained armies of Persia and Byzantium, and to influence the thought and life of mankind for ever.

Such a career was bound to attract the attention of the people who witnessed it. The Prophet, with his many-sided activities and revolutionary utterances, could not have passed unobserved and unnoticed by the people among whom he lived and moved. At least, since the time he began to preach his mission, both his deadly foes and his faithful and devoted friends must have been equally interested in him as well as in his sayings and doings.

To his enemies he had been a revolutionary bent upon destroying the whole fabric of their society whose activities they keenly watched in order to stop the progress of his mission. His utterances must have served them as an important topic for reflection, conversation and sometimes even heated discussions. They watched his movements so closely and carefully that many of his secretly conceived plans could not escape their watchful eyes. Their leader, Abū Lahab, kept close to him when he preached his faith to the Arabian tribes, and dissuaded them from paying any attention to his peaceful preachings.<sup>8</sup> They discovered his plans when his followers were migrating from Arabia to Abyssinia. They followed their footsteps in order to try to stop them from getting out of their clutches.<sup>9</sup> They found out that he talked with the people of Madīnah when he conversed with them in secret, and threatened the Madīnites with open hostility if they continued their friendship with him.<sup>10</sup>

The interest of the followers of the Prophet in him and in his sayings and doings was naturally greater than that of his foes. They had accepted him as their sole guide and prophet. They had completely identified themselves with him in his struggle against the Quraysh and the other tribes. With his future and with the future of the faith revealed to him was bound up their own future. On his success depended their own success. All his actions served them as

a precedent (Sunnah), every word falling from his lips was a law to them, and all his actions were virtuous in their eyes, which they wanted to follow as faithfully as they could. When he chose a gold ring for himself, his friends also put it on; and when he put it off, threw it away, and put on a silver ring instead, they also followed his example.<sup>11</sup> If he offered prayers at midnight, all his friends wanted to do the same, and he himself had to stop them from so doing.<sup>12</sup> If he fasted continuously for more than a day, his followers also desired to do the same, and he had to explain to them his special privileges.<sup>13</sup> Zayd b. Khālīd spent one whole night at his door in order to see him offer his night prayers.<sup>14</sup> Nawwās b. Sam'ān stayed at Madīnah for one whole year in order to enquire from the Prophet what was virtue and what was vice.<sup>15</sup> Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī observed keenly how long he kept standing in his afternoon prayers.<sup>16</sup> Ibn 'Umar counted how many times he asked pardon of God in one sitting.<sup>17</sup>

The Hadīth in this sense of the reports of the sayings and doings of the Prophet has been a subject of keen pursuit and constant study by the Muslims throughout the Muslim world since the very beginning of the history of Islam up to the present times. During the life-time of the Prophet many of his Companions tried to get by heart whatever he said, and observed keenly whatever he did; and they reported these things to one another. Some of them wrote down what he said in *ṣahīfahs* which were later on read by them to their students, and which were preserved in their families and also by the Followers (*Tābi'ūn*). After the death of the Prophet, when his Companions spread in various countries, some of them as well as their Followers undertook long arduous journeys, courted poverty and penury in order to collect them together. They founded independent branches of literature which would help them in understanding the Hadīths of their prophet and in testing its reliability and genuineness. They deduced various theological sciences from them. Their remarkable activity with regard to the preservation and propagation of Hadīth is unique in the literary history of the world. The stage of perfection upto which they developed the system of *Isnād* in Hadīth, the vast literature on the

*Asmā' al-Rijāl* which they created as an aid to the formal criticism of Traditions, the literature on the *Usūl al-Hadīth* which serves as an aid to their material criticism, and the literature on the *Mawdū'āt* which deals with what has been forged and fabricated in the name of the Prophet, remain unparalleled in the literary history of the world even today.

The Companions of the Prophet had so much respect and reverence for him that one of them collected his perspiration, and made a will that it should be sprinkled on his dead body before it was put into the grave.<sup>18</sup> Some of them vied and sometimes even quarrelled with one another in order to get the water left by him after performing his ablution, and considered it a privilege to drink it or to apply it to their bodies.<sup>19</sup> Some of them preserved carefully what was touched by him and used it as a cure for diseases.<sup>20</sup> Some of them presented to him their children for his blessings. Some of them considered it a privilege if their sons were accepted by him as his attendants.<sup>21</sup>

### The writing of Hadīths

Many of these devoted Companions of the Prophet, if not all of them, naturally hankered after the knowledge of what he said or did. Abū Hurayrah kept his constant company for three years at the sacrifice of all worldly pursuits in order to see and hear what he did and said,<sup>22</sup> and regularly devoted a considerable time to getting by heart what he had heard from him.<sup>23</sup> 'Abdullāh b. 'Amr b. al-'Ās wrote down all that he heard from the Prophet.<sup>24</sup> Abū Shihāb, Zayd and Ziyād also did the same. 'Āzib, when asked by Abū Bakr to deliver his message to al-Barā', did not leave his company until he had related to him what he and the Prophet had done when they came out of Makkah and were followed by the Quraysh.<sup>25</sup> 'Umar b. al-Khattāb, who was living at a distance from Madīnah and was unable to attend to the Prophet everyday, made an agreement with one of the *Anṣār* that they would attend him every alternate day and report to each other whatever they saw or heard from him.<sup>26</sup> Such others of his followers as failed to notice any of his sayings or



doings (on account of being away from him) learnt the same from those who had heard them, taking great care about the veracity of their reporters. As a matter of fact, it is said to have been a common practice among the friends of the Prophet that whenever any two of them met, one of them enquired from the other whether there was any Hadīth (the news of the sayings and the doings of the Prophet), and the other in his reply reported some sayings and doings of the Prophet.<sup>27</sup> This practice seems to have been in vogue at least among some Muslim scholars even so late as the end of the eighth century A.H., when Ismā'īl 'Aqūlī of Baghdad on meeting Ibrāhīm of Aleppo asked him, after the customary salutations, whether he knew any Hadīth. The latter in his answer recited some Hadīths from the *Sahīh al-Bukhārī* with their *Isnads*.<sup>28</sup>

The Prophet himself attached a good deal of importance to the knowledge of his own Hadīth. He asked his friends and followers to make them as widely known as possible, taking care that they should not attribute to him anything falsely.<sup>29</sup> He asked his followers to acquire knowledge and teach it to others;<sup>30</sup> and while explaining knowledge, he included in it the Qur'an and the Sunnah. The course of study prescribed by him to the *Ashāb al-Suffah* included the Qur'an, the Sunnah and the art of writing.<sup>31</sup> In the appointment of the state officials also he gave preference to those who combined the knowledge of the Sunnah with that of the Qur'an. Such was the case with the appointment of the *Imams*<sup>32</sup> and the *Qādīs*, and is likely to have been the case with other appointments also. He asked Mu'ādh when the latter was going out as governor of Yemen on what basis he would govern. "On the basis of the Qur'an", Mu'ādh replied. "Suppose", said the Prophet, "that you do not find it in the Qur'an". "Then on the basis of the Sunnah" answered Mu'ādh.<sup>33</sup>

After the death of the Prophet the importance of Hadīth grew greater and greater. Von Kremer rightly says:

The life of the Prophet, his discourses and utterances, his actions, his silent approval and even his passive conduct, constituted next to the Qur'an the second most important source of law for the young Muslim empire.<sup>34</sup>

Von Kremer has correctly pointed out the importance of the Hadīth as a source of Muhammadan law. But actually the part played by it in the development of Arabic literature is much greater than this. It is the Hadīth and the Qur'an that have been the main cause of the origin of many branches of Arabic literature, e.g., History, Geography, the collection of the ancient Arabian poetry, Lexicography, etc. It will not be an exaggeration to say that the Hadīth and the Qur'an had been the basis of all the scientific activities of the Arabs.

Thus, the Hadīth originated in the early life of the Prophet of Islam, developed largely throughout his life, and spread simultaneously with the spread of Islam throughout the vast Muslim dominions. The Muslim armies which conquered Syria, Palestine, Persia and Egypt included a large number of the Companions of Prophet Muhammad, who carried his Hadīth wherever they went. Even the distant lands of North Africa and Spain<sup>35</sup> received the reports of Prophet's sayings and doings before the end of the first century. Similarly, the message of the Sunnah and the Qur'an had been received by India before its conquest by Muslims before the end of the first century A.H.<sup>36</sup>

### **The collection of Hadīths**

Hadīth which thus spread throughout the vast Muslim dominions had been preserved for about a century partly in writing (in the form of laws and letters dictated by the Prophet himself, and in the form of various *sahīfahs* ascribed to many of his Companions), and partly in the memory of those who had associated with him and watched carefully his words and deeds. After the death of the Prophet, 'Umar I intended to collect the Hadīths. He gave the matter his careful consideration for one whole month, invoking the help of God in his decision, and seeking the advice of his friends. But he had to give up the great project for the fear of the Qur'an being neglected by the Muslims.<sup>37</sup>

'Umar II (61-101 A.H.), the saintly Caliph of the dynasty of the worldly Umayyads, initiated and partly carried out the tremendous

task which was only thought of by his great predecessor whom he tried to follow in many respects. This saintly Caliph had a great zeal for his religion which he tried to purify from the evils that had crept into it by the time he came to power.<sup>38</sup> The teaching and the collection of Hadīth naturally formed an important part of his plan. He appointed paid teachers to teach the Qur'an to the ignorant Bedouins,<sup>39</sup> supported and helped the teachers and students of *Fiqh*,<sup>40</sup> sent instructions to the governor of the Hijāz that weekly lectures should be delivered on Hadīth,<sup>41</sup> and sent out men well-versed in the subject to Egypt and North Africa as instructors to the Muslims living in those countries.<sup>42</sup>

Fearing the loss of Hadīth, he took steps towards their collection. To a great traditionist, Abū Bakr b. Muḥammad b. Ḥazm (d. 100 A.H./719 A.D.) who lived in Madīnah, he wrote to ask him to write down all the Hadīth of the Prophet and of 'Umar — particularly those he could learn from 'Amrah, the daughter of 'Abd al-Rahmān, who was at that time the best custodian of such Hadīth as were related by 'Ā'ishah.<sup>43</sup> 'Umar II is also reported to have asked Sa'd b. Ibrāhīm<sup>44</sup> and Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhri<sup>45</sup> to collect Hadīth in the form of books in order to have them circulated throughout his dominion. According to Abū Nu'aym's *History of Isfahān* (cited by Ibn Hajar),<sup>46</sup> 'Umar even wrote a circular letter asking the traditionists living in the various parts of his dominion to collect in the form of books as many Hadīth as were available.<sup>47</sup>

The fact that these works have not been mentioned by any of the later writers on the subject, and that there appear to be some contradictions in later references to the persons concerned, has led an eminent orientalist to hold that what has been attributed to 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz in connection with the collection of Hadīth is only an expression of what the Muslims would expect from the Pious Caliph.<sup>48</sup> But another eminent orientalist, Dr. Sprenger, had already shown<sup>49</sup> that the early Muslim writers used to refer to the authors instead of referring to the books. As regards the contradictions, they are only apparent, and can be easily explained. Therefore, it is not merely an expression of what later Muslims expected from the Pious Caliph, but as a matter of fact all the attending circumstances point

to the probability of what is attributed to him.

The great work initiated by 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz was helped by the spirit of the age, and the result was extensive. Abū Qalābah (d. 104 or 107 A.H.) is stated to have made a will of his books.<sup>50</sup> Makhūl (d. 116 A.H./734 A.D.), who had travelled through Egypt and Syria and had lived for some time in Madīnah in order to acquire knowledge at all these places,<sup>51</sup> wrote a book on the Sunnah which has been mentioned by Ibn al-Nadīm in his *Fihrist*.<sup>52</sup> Al-Zuhri (d. 124 A.H./742 A.D.) is stated by Ibn Sa'd to have collected so many Hadīth that after his death his manuscripts needed beasts of burden for their removal.<sup>53</sup>

The early students and workers on the Hadīth were followed by various *Muhaddithūn* who carried on the work begun by their predecessors almost simultaneously in various provinces of the vast Muslim empire. Of these collectors of Hadīths, 'Abd al-Mālik b. 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Jurayj (d. 150 A.H./760 A.D.) worked at Makkah, Sa'd b. 'Arūbah (d. 157 A.H.) at Mesopotamia, al-Awzā'ī (d. 159 A.H.) in Syria, Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Rahmān (d. 159 A.H.) at Madīnah, Zā'idah b. Qudāmah (d. 160 A.H.) and Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 160 A.H.) at Kūfah, and Hammād b. Salāmah (d. 165 A.H.) at Baṣrah.<sup>54</sup>

As almost all these works are entirely lost, no opinion can be expressed on their plan, method or merit. But Ibn al-Nadīm who has mentioned these works has also given a short criticism in each case. He calls the works of Ibn Jurayj, Ibn 'Arūbah, al-Awzā'ī, Ibn 'Abd al-Rahmān and Zā'idah b. Qudāmah works on the Sunnah, and says that they are arranged like books of *Fiqh* — in chapters devoted to its problems. They were probably works of the same type as the *Muwatta'* of Imam Mālik who might have followed in the general plan of it the system adopted by some of these earlier writers. Two of the books of Sufyān al-Thawrī, however, which were related by various scholars, were works of a different type. About one of them Ibn al-Nadīm says that it is similar to Hadīth works.<sup>55</sup> But this also has been lost.

### The *Muwatta'*

The earliest work connected with our subject which has been received by us is the *Muwatta'* of Imam Mālik which has been fully described and criticised by Goldziher.<sup>56</sup> He is of the opinion that the *Muwatta'* is not a work on Ḥadīth in the same sense in which the *Sahih al-Bukhārī* and other later works are:

It is a *corpus juris*, and not a *corpus traditionum*. Its object was not to sift the Ḥadīths current in the Muslim world and to collect them together, but to demonstrate the religious laws, rituals and practices which were in keeping with the Sunnah prevalent in Madīnah, and which were in agreement with the *Ijmā'* accepted by the Muslims of Madīnah, and to produce on the basis of the *Ijmā'* and the Sunnah a theoretical standard for doubtful cases.

In order to prove his theory, Goldziher has quoted the fact that Imam Mālik has included in his work a large number of *fatwas* and customs in vogue in Madīnah, without trying to prove them by Ḥadīth; that even in quoting the Ḥadīths he has not given the *Isnād* in all cases, and that he has not made any mention of such Ḥadīths as are of purely historical character.

These facts certainly show that the *Muwatta'* was not intended to serve as a collection of Ḥadīths. But it may be said with equal justice that it is not a book of *Fiqh* in the same sense in which later books on *Fiqh* are said to be works on the subject. It contains a very large number of *Ḥadīth al-Ahkām* (legal traditions). According to al-Zarqānī, as Goldziher has pointed out, there are in it 1,720 Ḥadīths, of which 600 contain *Isnāds*, 222 are *mursal*, 613 are *mawqūf* and 285 stop either at a *Ṣahābi* or at a *Tābi'ī* (i.e. are either *mawqūf* or *maqtū'*)<sup>57</sup>. According to al-Ghāfiqī, the total number of Ḥadīths in the twelve versions of the *Muwatta'* is 666, out of which 97 differ in the different versions of the book, and the rest are common in all the various recensions.<sup>58</sup> The great difference between al-Zarqānī's and al-Ghāfiqī's estimates seems to be due to the latter's not taking into account the versions of the *Muwatta'* by al-Shaybānī and others.<sup>59</sup> Originally, however, the number of Ḥadīths in the

*Muwatta'* is reported to have been between 4,000 and 10,000 which were reduced by the author himself to about 1,000.<sup>60</sup>

The *Muwatta'* may be treated as a good collection of Hadīths in the sense of the legal traditions. Some Muslim authorities like 'Izz al-Dīn b. al-Athīr, Ibn 'Abd al-Barr and 'Abd al-Haq of Delhi include it instead of the *Sunan* of Ibn Mājah in the six canonical collections. Of course the majority of them do not count it as one of the six books because almost all the important traditions contained in it are included in the *Sahīhs* of al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

On the analogy of the *Muwatta'*, however, we may reasonably assume that the other *Sunan* works compiled before or simultaneously with it also contained a fair proportion of the *Hadith al-Ahkām*, and might therefore be treated like the *Muwatta'* as Hadīth works.

### The legal and historical traditions

Since the earliest times the Muslims have made a distinction between the legal traditions (*Hadith al-Ahkām*) and the purely historical traditions (the *Maghāzī*). In the *Tabaqāt* of Ibn Sa'd some Companions are described as being well versed in the *Fiqh* (Law) and others are stated to be authorities on the *Maghāzī* (the historical traditions). In the treatment of the legal traditions they had been careful and critical; whereas in relating the historical traditions they were rather free. Suhayb, a Companion, used to say: "Come along, I will tell you the tales of our battles (*Maghāzī*), but I will not relate to you that the Prophet has said such and such things."<sup>61</sup> Sā'ib b. Yazīd heard Talhah relate the tales of the battle of Uhud, whereas he did not hear other Companions relate any Hadīths of the Prophet.<sup>62</sup> From these and other similar reports it appears that the *Maghāzī* served the early Muslims as topics for their general conversations. But with the legal traditions they had been careful and scrupulous.

The word *Fiqh* itself had been used sometimes in the sense of Hadīth. Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, after relating a Hadīth, points out that here

the word *Fiqh* is used in the sense of *Hadīth*.<sup>63</sup> As a matter of fact, the Islamic law in its earliest period consisted of little else than the legal traditions (*Hadīth al-Ahkām*). It is therefore that all such Companions as are reported to have related the largest number of *Hadīths* e.g. 'Ā'ishah, Ibn Mas'ūd, 'Abdullāh b. 'Abbās are described as *Faqīhs*.

The number of the legal traditions appears to be rather small. Muhibb al-Dīn al-Tabarī has mentioned only 1,029 of them in his *al-Ahkām al-Sughrah* which is devoted to the legal traditions only.<sup>64</sup> Hāfiz 'Abd al-Ghanī in his *Umdat al-Ahkām* has mentioned only 500 of them.<sup>65</sup> Ibn Hajar in his *Bulūgh al-Marām* has quoted about 1,338 of them.<sup>66</sup> Ibn Taymīyah (Majd al-Dīn) in his *Muntaqa* has of course quoted a much larger number. But he has often treated the sayings and the doings of the Companions also as *Hadīths*, and sometimes he treats the various versions of the same *Hadīths* as independent ones.<sup>67</sup>

### Classification of books of *Hadīth*

Books of *Hadīth* have been classified into the following groups:

1. *Sahīfahs*.
2. *Ajzā'*.
3. *Rasā'il* or *Kutub*.
4. *Musannafs*.
5. *Musnads*.
6. *Mu'jams*.
7. *Jāmi's*.
8. *Sunans*.
9. *Mustadraks*.
10. *Mustakhrajs*.
11. *Arba'inīyāt*.

1. The *Sahīfahs* are such collections of the sayings of the Prophet as were written down by some of his Companions during his

life-time or by their followers in the next generation. Several of these *Ṣahīfahs* have been mentioned by Goldziher according to whom some of them are also described as *Rasā'il* and as *Kutub*.<sup>68</sup> One of them which was collected by Abū Hurayrah and taught and handed down by him to his student, Hammām b. Munabbih, has been edited by Dr. Hamīdullāh.<sup>69</sup> But the most important of them is the *Ṣahīfah* which was collected by 'Abdullāh b. 'Amr b. al-'Aṣ, who gave it the title of *al-Sādiqah*.<sup>70</sup>

2. The *Ajzā'* are such collections of the Traditions as have been handed down on the authority of one single individual — be he a Companion or of any generation after him. The term *Juz'* is also applied to such collections of Hadīths as have been compiled on a particular subject-matter — e.g. 'Intention', the 'Vision of God', etc.<sup>71</sup>

3. The *Rasā'il* are such collections of Hadīths that deal with one particular topic out of eight topics into which the contents of the *Jāmi'* books of Hadīths may be generally classified.

These topics are:

- i. Beliefs or Dogma.
- ii. Laws or *Ahkām* which are also known as *Sunan* and include all the subjects of *Fiqh* from *Tahārat* or Purity to *Waṣāyā* or Exhortations.
- iii. *Ruqāq*, i.e., Piety, Asceticism, Mysticism.
- iv. Etiquette in eating, drinking, travelling, etc.
- v. *Tafsīr* or commentary on the Qur'an.
- vi. *Tā'rīkh* and *Siyar*, i.e., historical and biographical matters which include (a) Cosmology, Ancient History, etc. and (b) the life of the Prophet, of his Companions and Successors.
- vii. *Fitan*, i.e., Crises.
- viii. Appreciation (*Manāqib*) and denunciation (*Mathālib*) of persons, places, etc.

The *Rasā'il* are also called Books (*Kutub*). To this class belong many of the works of Ibn Hajar, al-Suyūṭī, and others.<sup>72</sup>

4. *Musannafs* are those large collections of Hadīths in which the traditions relating to most or all the various topics mentioned above



are put together and arranged in various books or chapters, each dealing with a particular topic. To this class belong the *Muwatta'* of Imam Mālik, the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim, etc.

5. The term *Musnad* (supported) was originally used for such traditions as were supported by a complete uninterrupted chain of authorities (*Isnād*) going back to a Companion who related it from the Prophet himself.<sup>73</sup> But later on the term came to be used in the general sense of a reliable and authoritative tradition. In this sense the term is also used for all reliable works in the Hadīth literature, and works like the *Sunan* of al-Dārimī and the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhārī are called *Musnads*. But technically it is used only for those collections of Hadīths in which they are arranged according to the names of the final authorities by whom they are related, irrespective of their subject-matter. Such are the *Musnads* of Abū Dāwūd Tayālīsī (d. 204 A.H./819 A.D.), Ahmad b. Hanbal (d. 233 A.H./847 A.D.), 'Abdullāh b. Muḥammad b. Abī Shaybah (d. 235 A.H./849 A.D.), 'Uthmān b. Abī Shaybah (d. 237 A.H./851 A.D.), Abū Khaythamah (d. 234 A.H./844 A.D.) and others.<sup>74</sup> He who collected Hadīths in the form of a *Musnad* is called a *Musnid* or a *Musnidi*.<sup>75</sup> The *Musnad* works themselves, however, differ in detail in the arrangement of the authorities who originally related them. In some of them they are arranged in the alphabetical order of their names. In some of them they are arranged according to their relative merit in the acceptance of Islam and in taking part in the early important events of the Prophet's mission. In some of them they are arranged according to the affinity of their tribe to the Prophet.<sup>76</sup>

There are, however, certain *Musnad* works which are divided into chapters devoted to various subjects, and in each chapter the Hadīths are arranged according to the original authorities, Companions, by whom they are related. This plan is followed by Abū Ya'la<sup>77</sup> (d. 276 A.H./889 A.D.) and Abū 'Abd al-Rahmān in their *Musnad* works.<sup>78</sup> These works combine the characteristics of the *Musnad* and of the *Musannaf* works.

Some of the *Musnad*-compilers, however, tried to collect together all the available traditions reported by the various Companions.<sup>79</sup> The *Musnad* of Ibn al-Najjār is said to have contained

the traditions related by all the Companions. The *Musnad* of Ahmad b. Hanbal contains more than 30,000 traditions reported by about 700 Companions.<sup>80</sup> The *Musnad* of Abū 'Abd al-Rahmān is reported by Hājī Khalīfah on the authority of Ibn Hazm to have contained traditions related by 1,300 Companions.<sup>81</sup> There are, however, many *Musnad* works which are devoted to traditions related either by special group of Companions or by one single Companion only.

6. The term *Mu'jam* is generally applied to such works on various subjects as are arranged in alphabetical order. The geographical and the biographical dictionaries of Yāqūt are called *Mu'jam al-Buldān* and *Mu'jam al-Udabā*, because they are arranged alphabetically. Such *Musnad* collections of Hadīths as are arranged under the names of the Companions in their alphabetical order are also known as *Mu'jam al-Sahābah*. But according to the authorities on the science of Tradition, the term is used technically for such collections of Hadīths only as are arranged not according to the Companions who reported them, but according to the traditionists from whom the compiler himself received them. The names of such traditionists (*shuyūkh*) are arranged alphabetically,<sup>82</sup> and all the traditions received from each *shaykh* are then collected together irrespective of their contents and subject-matter. To this class belong two of the collections of al-Ṭabarānī (260 A.H./870 A.D.-360/970) and the collections of Ibrāhīm b. Ismā'īl (d. 371 A.H./981 A.D.) and Ibn al-Qānī' (d. 350 A.H./960 A.D.).<sup>83</sup> The largest collection by al-Ṭabarānī is in reality a *Musnad* work, not a *Mu'jam* work; for it is a *Mu'jam al-Sahābah*, not a *Mu'jam al-Shuyūkh*.

7. *Jāmi'* are those collections of Hadīths which contain traditions relating to all the various subject-matters mentioned under the *Rasā'il*. Thus, the *Sahīh* of al-Bukhārī as well as the book of Tirmidhī is called *Jāmi'*. But the *Sahīh* of Muslim is not described as *Jāmi'*, because (unlike al-Bukhārī) it does not contain traditions relating to all the chapters of the Qur'an.

8. *Sunan* are such collections of the traditions as contain *Hadīth al-Ahkām* (legal traditions) only, and leave out those traditions which relate to historical and other matters. Thus the collections of traditions made by Abū Dāwūd, Nasā'ī and many other traditionists

are known as *Sunan* works.

9. *Mustadraks* are such collections of Hadīths in which the compiler, having accepted the conditions laid down by any previous compiler, collects together such other traditions as fulfil those conditions and were missed by the previous compiler. To this class belongs the *Mustadrak* of al-Hākim who collected together such Hadīths as fulfilled the conditions laid down by al-Bukhārī and Muslim and were not included by them in their *Sahīhs*.

10. *Mustakhrajs* are those collections of Hadīths in which a later compiler of them collects together fresh *Isnāds* for such traditions as were collected by a previous compiler on the basis of different chains of *Isnād*. To this class belongs the *Mustakhraj* of Abū Nu'aym Isfahānī on the *Sahīhs* of al-Bukhārī and of Muslim. In this book Abū Nu'aym has given fresh chains of *Isnād* for some of the traditions which were already included by al-Bukhārī and Muslim in their *Sahīhs* with different *Isnads*.

11. The *Arba'īnīyāt*, as the name shows, are the collections of forty Hadīths relating to one or more subjects which may have appeared to be of special interest to the compiler. An example of this class is the *Arba'in* of al-Nawawī.

Of all these eleven classes of the collections of Hadīths, the *Sahīfahs*, as their description shows, were the earliest in origin. The *Mu'jams*, the *Mustadraks*, the *Mustakhrajs* and the *Arba'īnīyāt* must have been the latest. The *Ajzā'* and the *Rasā'il* in their technical sense described above also must have been later in origin and development than the *Musannaf* and the *Musnad* works. The *Sunan* and the *Jāmi'* being only subdivisions of the *Musannaf* works, the problem of the priority of origin of the remaining classes of the Hadīth works rests between the *Musannafs* and the *Musnads* which is difficult to decide. Goldziher is of the opinion that the *Musnads* are earlier in origin than the *Musannafs* which originated under the influence of the legal system of the *Ashāb al-Hadīth*.<sup>84</sup> But as the collection of Hadīths was greatly due to their legal importance, it is not unlikely that some of the very early collections of them were arranged according to their subject-matter connected with the Islamic legal, ritual or religious problems, as is also suggested by the title

*Kitāb al-Sunan* given to them.

The Hadīth thus collected by the continuous, hard and honest work of many generations of the Muslims of various countries belonging to different schools of thought, has been a subject of study of the Muslim scholars and a source of inspiration to the Muslim world upto the present time. The Hadīth together with the Qur'an served the Muslims as the main basis of their social structure. On this twofold basis originated and developed the various Islamic sciences. To these two turns an average Muslim for inspiration and guidance. On them can be properly based the reconstruction of the Islamic thought according to the requirements of modern times. The efforts of many modern reformers have so far failed because they ignored the Qur'an and the Hadīth, just as some Medieval Islamic sects could not flourish because they had ignored their importance.

## NOTES

1. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Egypt 1309 A.H.), i, 20.
2. Abū Muḥammad al-Dārimī, *Sunan* (Kanpur 1292-93 A.H.), ed. 'Abd al-Rashīd al-Kashmīrī, p.46.
3. Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat al-Huffāz* (Hyderabad 1330 A.H.), ed. Sayyid Muṣṭafā 'Alī, vol.i, p.6.
4. *Ibid.*, vol.I, p.7.
5. Ahmad b. Muḥammad al-Qastallānī, *al-Mawāhib al-Ladunnīyah* (Egypt 1291 A.H.), vol.v, p.454.
6. *Mufaddaliyāt* (Oxford 1918-21), ed. C.J. Lyall, vol.lxvi p.5; vol.cxxiii, p.16.
7. I. Goldziher, *Muhammedanische Studien* (Halle 1889), vol.ii, pp.11-13.
8. Ibn Sa'd, *Kitāb al-Tabaqāt al-Kabīr* (Leiden 1904-18), ed. Edward Sachau, *et.al.*, vol.i, pt.I, p.145.
9. *Ibid.*, p.136.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, kitāb al-I'tisām, bāb al-iqtidā' bi af'āl al-nabī, vol.iv, p.166.
12. *Ibid.*, k. al-tahajjud, b. ṣalāt al-layl, vol.i, p.136.
13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*, k. *al-I'tisām*, b. *al-ta'ammuq*, vol.iv, p.166.
15. *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (Delhi 1309 A.H.), k. *al-Birr*, b. *tafsīr al-Birr*, vol.ii, p.314.
16. Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan* (Delhi 1346 A.H.), ed. 'Abd al-Aḥad, "*Istighfār*", vol.i, p.119.
17. *Ibid.*, "*Takhfīf al-Ukhrayayn*", vol.i, p.124.
18. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, iv, 62.
19. *Ibid.*, k. *al-Wadū'*, b. *Isti'māl Fadl al-Wadū'*, vol.i, pp.32-33.
20. Ibn Sa'd, *op. cit.*, vol.viii, p.234.
21. *Ibid.*, p.73.
22. *Ibid.*, vol.iv, pt.2, p.56.
23. Al-Dārimī, *op. cit.*, p.45.
24. Ibn Sa'd, *op. cit.*, vol.ii, pt.2, p.125.
25. *Ibid.*, vol.iv, pt.2, p.80.
26. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, k. 'Ilm, b. *al-Tanāwub*, vol.i, p.19.
27. *Zeitschrift der deutschen moregenlandischen Gesellschaft* (Leipzig), vol.x, p.2.
28. *Ibid.*
29. Walī al-Dīn Muḥammad b. 'Abdullāh al-Khaṭīb al-'Umarī al-Tibrīzī, *Mishkāṭ al-Maṣābiḥ* (Lucknow 1326 A.H.), p.32.
30. *Ibid.*, p.35.
31. Hammām b. Munabbih, *Ṣaḥīfah* (Paris 1380 A.H.), ed. Ḥamīdullāh, p.9.
32. *Ibid.*
33. Ibn Sa'd, *op. cit.*, vol.ii, pt.2, p.107.
34. Von Kremer, *Orient under the Caliphs* (Calcutta 1920), trl. S. Khudā Bakhsh, p.260.
35. Al-Munaydhir, a Companion, had visited Spain. See Aḥmad al-Maghribī al-Maqqarī, *Nafḥ al-Tib* (Cairo 1302 A.H.), vol.i, p.130.
36. See ch.I in *India's Contribution to the Study of Ḥadīth Literature* (Dacca 1955).
37. Ibn Sa'd, *op. cit.*, vol.iii, pt.I, p.206. However, 'Umar spread in various other ways the knowledge of Ḥadīth among Muslims living in various parts of the Caliphate.
38. Goldziher, *op. cit.*, vol.2, p.34.
39. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. al-Jawzī, *Sīrat 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz* (Egypt 1331 A.H.).
40. *Ibid.*

41. *Ibid.*
42. Al-Maqqarī, *op. cit.*, vol.i, p.130.
43. Ibn Sa'd, *op. cit.*, vol.ii, pt.2, p.134; *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, k. 'Ilm, b. *kitābat*.
44. Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *Jāmi' Bayān al-'Ilm wa Fadlihi* (Cairo), pt.I, p.76.
45. Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Sakhāwī, *Fath al-Mughīth* (commentary on Zayn al-Dīn 'Irāqī's *Alfiyah*) (Lucknow), p.239.
46. Ibn Hajar 'Asqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī* (commentary to *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*), (Egypt 1319 A.H.), vol.i, p.174.
47. *Ibid.*
48. Goldziher, *op. cit.*, vol.ii, pp.210-211.
49. A. Sprenger, "On the origin and progress of writing down historical facts among the Musulmans", *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* (Calcutta), vol.xxv, pp.103 ff., 1856.
50. Al-Dhahabī, *op. cit.*, vol.i, p.82.
51. *Ibid.*, p.95.
52. Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist* (Leipzig 1871-72), ed. Gustav Flügel, pp.225-27.
53. Ibn Sa'd, *op. cit.*, vol.ii, pt.2, p.136.
54. Ibn al-Nadīm, *loc. cit.*
55. *Ibid.*, p.225.
56. Goldziher, *op. cit.*, vol.ii, pp.213-216.
57. *Ibid.*, p.213.
58. Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz Dihlawī, *Bustān al-Muḥaddithīn* (Delhi 1898), p.25.
59. viz. Yahyā al-Tamīmī, Abū Hudhayfah and Suwayd b. Sa'id.
60. Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Bāqī al-Zarqānī, commentary on Imam Mālik's *al-Muwatta'* (Egypt 1310 A.H.), i, 8.
61. Ibn Sa'd, *op. cit.*, vol.iii, pt.1, p.164.
62. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, k. *al-Jihād*, b. *man haddatha b' mashāhidihi*, vol.ii, p.97.
63. Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *op. cit.*, pt.ii, p.27.
64. See Muṣṭafa b. 'Abdullāh Hājī Khalīfah, *Kashf al-Zunūn* (Leipzig 1835-42), ed. Gustav Flügel, vol.i, pp.174-75.
65. *Ibid.*, vol.iv, p.254 ff.
66. *Ibid.*, vol.ii, p.68.
67. *Ibid.*, vol.vi, p.167. This number is based on my own calculation.
68. Goldziher, *op. cit.*, vol.ii, pp.231-32.

69. Hammām, *op. cit.*
70. Goldziher, *op. cit.*, vol.ii, pp.10-11.
71. Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz Dihlāwī, *Risālah dar Fann-i-Uṣul-i-Ḥadīth ('Ujālah-i-Nāfi'ah)* (Delhi 1255 A.H.), p.22.
72. *Ibid.*, pp.19-20, 22-23.
73. For the difference of opinion about the definition of the *musnad* Ḥadīth, Tāhir b. Sālīh al-Jazā'irī, *Tawjīh al-Nazar ilā Uṣūl al-Athar* (Egypt 1328 A.H.), p.66.
74. A large number of *Musnad* works are mentioned by Hājī Khalīfah, *op. cit.*, vol.v, pp.532-43.
75. Goldziher, *op. cit.*, vol.ii, p.227.
76. Dihlawī, *op. cit.*, p.21.
77. Dihlawī, *Bustān al-Muhaddāthīn*, p.37.
78. Hājī Khalīfah, *op. cit.*, vol.v, p.534.
79. Goldziher, *op. cit.*, vol.ii, p.229.
80. Tāj al-Dīn Abū Nasr 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyah al-Kubrā*, vol.i, p.202.
81. Hājī Khalīfah, *op. cit.*, vol.v, p.534.
82. Should they be arranged in the chronological order, the work would be called *Mashikhat*. See *Catalogue of the Arabic and Persian Manuscripts in the Oriental Public Library at Bankipore* (Patna 1920), vol.v, pt.2 (1927), p.41 fn.
3. Dihlawī, *op. cit.*, pp.56, 95.
4. Goldziher, *op. cit.*, vol.ii, pp.232 ff.

# COLLECTION AND PRESERVATION OF HADĪTH

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MUHAMMAD 'ALĪ

## Sunnah and Hadīth

Sunnah or Hadīth is the second and undoubtedly secondary source from which the teachings of Islam are drawn. Sunnah literally means *a way or rule or manner of acting or mode of life*, and Hadīth, *a saying conveyed to man either through hearing or through revelation*.<sup>1</sup> In its original sense, therefore Sunnah indicate the doings and Hadīth the sayings of the Holy Prophet; but in effect both cover the same ground and are applicable to his actions, practices, and sayings, Hadīth being the narration and record of the Sunnah but containing, in addition, various prophetic and historical elements. There are three kinds of Sunnah. It may be a *qaul* — a saying of the Holy Prophet which has a bearing on a religious question, a *fi'l* — an action or a practice of his, or a *taqrīr* — his silent approval of the action or practice of another. We have now to consider to what extent can teachings of Islam, its principles and its law, be drawn from this source. Any student of the Qur'an will see that the Holy



Book generally deals with the broad principles or essential of religion, going into detail in very rare cases. The detail were generally supplied by the Holy Prophet himself, either by showing in his practice how an injunction shall be carried out, or by giving an explanation in words.

The Sunnah or Hadīth of the Holy Prophet was not, as is generally supposed, a thing whereof the need may have been felt after his death, for it was as much needed in his lifetime. The two most important religious institutions of Islam, for instance, are prayer and *zakāt*; yet when the injunctions relating to prayer and *zakāt* were delivered, and they are repeatedly met with both in Makkah and Madīnah revelations, no details were supplied. *Aqīmu al-salāta* (keep up prayer) is the Qur'anic injunction, and it was the Prophet himself who by his own actions gave the details of the service. *Ātu al-zakāta* (pay the alms) is again an injunction frequently repeated in the Holy Qur'an, yet it was the Holy Prophet who gave the rules and regulations for its payment and collection. These are but two examples; but since Islam covered the whole sphere of human activities, hundreds of points had to be explained by the Holy Prophet by his example in action and word, while on the moral side, his was the pattern which every Muslim was required to follow (33:21). The man, therefore, who embraced Islam stood in need of both the Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah.

### Transmission of Hadīth in Prophet's lifetime

The transmission of the practices and sayings of the Holy Prophet from one person to another, thus became necessary during the Prophet's lifetime. In fact, the Holy Prophet himself used to give instructions with regard to the transmission of what he taught. Thus when a deputation of the tribe of Rabī'ah came to wait upon him in the early days of Madīnah, the Prophet concluded his instructions to them with the words: "Remember this and report it to those whom you have left behind".<sup>2</sup> Similar were his instructions in another case: "Go back to your people and teach them these things".<sup>3</sup> There is another report according to which on the occasion of a pilgrimage,

the Holy Prophet, after enjoining on the Muslims the duty of holding sacred each other's life, property and honour, added: "He who is present here should carry this message to him who is absent".<sup>4</sup> Again, there is ample historical evidence that whenever a people embraced Islam, the Holy Prophet used to send to them one or more of his missionaries who not only taught them the Holy Qur'an but also explained to them how the injunctions of the Holy Book were to be carried out in practice. It is also on record that people came to the Holy Prophet and demanded teachers who could teach them the Qur'an and the Sunnah: "Send us men to teach us the Qur'an and the Sunnah." And the Companions of the Holy Prophet knew full well that his actions and practices were to be followed, should no express direction be met with in the Holy Qur'an. It is related that when Mu'ādh b. Jabal, on being appointed Governor of Yemen by the Holy Prophet, was asked how he would judge cases, his reply was, "by the Book of Allah." Asked what he would do if he did not find a direction in the Book of Allah, he replied, "by the Sunnah of the Apostle of Allah".<sup>5</sup> The Sunnah was, therefore, recognized in the lifetime of the Holy Prophet as affording guidance in religious matters.

### **Writing of Hadith in Prophet's lifetime**

The popular idea in the West that the need for Sunnah was felt and the force of law given to Hadith after the death of the Holy Prophet is falsified by the above facts. Nor was the preservation of what the Prophet did or said an after-thought on the part of the Muslims, for the Companions of the Holy Prophet<sup>6</sup> while translating into practice most of his sayings endeavoured also to preserve them in memory as well as on paper. The need of the Sunnah, its force as law, and its preservation are all traceable to the lifetime of the Holy Prophet. A special importance was, from the first, attached to his sayings and deeds which were looked upon as a source of guidance by his followers. They were conscious of the fact that these things must be preserved for future generations; hence they not only kept them in their memory but even resorted to pen and ink for their preservation.

Abū Hurayrah tells us that when one of the *Ansār* (Helpers) complained to the Holy Prophet of his inability to remember what he heard from him, the Prophet's reply was that he should seek the help of his right hand (referring to the use of pen).<sup>7</sup> This Hadīth exists in many forms. Another well-known report is from 'Abdullāh b. 'Amr:

I used to write everything that I heard from the Holy Prophet, intending to commit it to memory. (On some people taking objection to this) I spoke about it to the Prophet who said, 'Write down, for I only speak the truth'.<sup>8</sup>

This Hadīth is very well-known and exists in thirty different forms with small difference. Yet again, there is another report from Abū Hurayrah: "None of the Companions preserved more Hadīth than myself, but 'Abdullāh b. 'Amr is an exception, for he used to write and I did not write."<sup>9</sup> Anas b. Mālik states that Abū Bakr wrote down for him the laws regarding alms.<sup>10</sup> 'Alī had also a saying of the Prophet with him in writing.<sup>11</sup> In the year of the conquest of Makkah, the Holy Prophet delivered a sermon on the occasion of a man being killed by way of retaliation for some old grievance. When the sermon was finished, one from among the people of Yemen came forward and requested the Holy Prophet to have it written down for him, and the Prophet gave orders to that effect.<sup>12</sup> These reports show that while generally Hadīth was committed to memory, it was occasionally, when there was need for it, reduced to writing. The last-mentioned incident affords the clearest testimony that, whatever the Companions heard from the lips of the Holy Prophet, they tried to keep in their memory, for how else could an order be given for the writing of a sermon which had been delivered orally.

### **Why Hadīth was not generally written**

It is, however, a fact that the sayings of the Holy Prophet were not generally written, and memory was the chief means of their preservation. The Holy Prophet sometimes objected to the writing down of Hadīth. Abū Hurayrah is reported to have said:

The Prophet of God came to us while we were writing Hadīth and said, 'What is this that you are writing?' We said, 'Hadīth which we hear from thee.' He said, 'What! a book other than the Book of Allah?'

Now the disapproval in this case clearly shows fear lest Hadīth be mixed up with the Holy Qur'an, though there was nothing essentially wrong in writing down Hadīth, nor did the Holy Prophet ever forbid its being done. On the other hand, as late as the conquest of Makkah, we find him giving orders himself for the writing down of a certain Hadīth at the request of a hearer. He also wrote letters, and treaties were also put down in writing, which shows that he never meant that the writing of anything besides the Qur'an was illegal. What he feared, as the report clearly shows, was that if his sayings were written down generally like the Qur'an, the two might get confused together, and the purity of the text of the Holy Qur'an be affected.

### **Memory could be trusted for preservation of knowledge**

Nor was memory an unreliable means for the preservation of Hadīth, for the Holy Qur'an itself was safely preserved in the memory of the Companions of the Holy Prophet in addition to being committed to writing. In fact, had the Holy Qur'an been simply preserved in writing, it could not have been handed down intact to future generations. The aid of memory was invoked to make the purity of the text of the Qur'an doubly sure. The Arab had a wonderfully retentive memory, and he had to store up his knowledge of countless things in his memory. It was in this safe custody that the beautiful poetry of the pre-Islamic days had been kept alive and intact. Indeed, before Islam, writing was but rarely resorted to, and memory was chiefly relied upon in all important matters. Hundreds and even thousands of verses could be recited from memory by one man, and the reciters would also remember the names of the persons through whom those verses had been transmitted to them. Asma'ī, a later transmitter, says that he learned twelve thousand verses by heart before he reached his majority; of Abū Zamzam, Asma'ī says that he recited verses from a hundred poets in a single sitting; Sha'bī says

that he knew so many verses by heart that he could continue repeating them for a month; and these verses were the basis of the Arabic vocabulary and even of Arabic grammar. Among the Companions of the Holy Prophet were many who knew by heart thousands of the verses of pre-Islamic poetry, and of these one was 'Ā'ishah, the Prophet's wife. The famous al-Bukhārī trusted to memory alone for the retention of as many as six hundred thousand Hadīths, and many students corrected their manuscripts by comparing them with what he had only retained in his memory.

### Collection of Hadīth: First stage

The first steps for the preservation of Hadīth were thus taken in the lifetime of the Holy Prophet,<sup>13</sup> but all his followers were not equally interested in the matter, nor had all equal chances of being so. Everyone had to work for his living, while on most of them the defence of the Muslim community against overwhelming odds had placed an additional burden. There was, however, a party of students called the *Ashāb al-Suffah* who lived in the mosque itself, and who were specially equipped for the teaching of religion to the tribes outside Madīnah. Some of these would go to the market and do a little work to earn livelihood; others would not care to do even that. Of this little band, the most famous was Abū Hurayrah, who would remain in the Prophet's company at all costs, and store up in his memory everything which the Holy Prophet said or did. His efforts were, from the first, directed towards the preservation of Hadīth. He himself is reported to have said once:

You say, Abū Hurayrah is profuse in narrating Hadīth from the Holy Prophet; and you say, how is it that the *Muhājirīn* (Refugees) and the *Ansār* (Helpers) do not narrate Hadīth from the Prophet like Abū Hurayrah? The truth is that our brethren from among the Refugees were occupied in transacting business in the market and I used to remain with the Holy Prophet having filled my belly, so I was present when they were absent and I remembered what they forgot; and our brethren from among the Helpers were occupied with work on their lands, and I was a poor man from among the poor inmates of the

Suffah, so I retained what they forgot.<sup>14</sup>

Another Companion, Talhah, son of 'Ubaydullāh, is reported to have said of Abū Hurayrah:

There is no doubt that he heard from the Holy Prophet what we did not hear. The reason was that he was a poor man who possessed nothing and was, therefore, a guest of the Prophet.<sup>15</sup>

Here is another report from Muḥammad b. 'Amārah:

He sat in a company of the older Companions of the Holy Prophet in which there were over ten men. Abū Hurayrah began to relate a certain saying of the Holy Prophet, which some of them did not know, so they questioned him over and over again until they were satisfied. Again, he related to them a saying in the same manner and he did this over and over again, and I was convinced that Abū Hurayrah had the best memory.<sup>16</sup>

According to another report, people used to say in the life time of the Holy Prophet that Abū Hurayrah narrated many sayings of the Holy Prophet. So Abū Hurayrah enquired of one of them as to which *Sūrah*s the Holy Prophet had recited in his night prayers the day before. The man being unable to answer the question, Abū Hurayrah himself named the *Sūrah*s,<sup>17</sup> which shows not only that he had a wonderful memory, but also that he tried his utmost to remember everything.

'Ā'ishah, the Prophet's wife, was also one of those who sought to preserve the Sunnah of the Prophet. She too had a marvellous memory, and was, in addition, gifted with a clear understanding, by virtue of which she refused to accept anything which she did not understand. There is a report about her, according to which "she never heard anything she did not recognize but she questioned about it again and again."<sup>18</sup> In other words, she accepted nothing, even from the lips of the Holy Prophet himself, until she was fully satisfied as to its meaning. 'Abdullāh b. 'Umar and 'Abdullāh b. 'Abbās are two other Companions who were specially engaged in the

work of preserving and transmitting the knowledge of the Qur'an and the Hadith; as also was 'Abdullāh b. 'Amr who used to write down the sayings of the Holy Prophet. And in addition to these, every Companion the Holy Prophet did his utmost to preserve such of his words and deeds as came to his knowledge. 'Umar, who resided about three miles from Madīnah, had made arrangements with a neighbour of his that they should be in the company of the Holy Prophet on alternate days, so that each might report to the other what happened in his absence.<sup>19</sup> And, most important of all, the Holy Prophet had repeatedly laid an obligation on every one of his followers to transmit his words to others: "Let him who is present deliver to him who is absent,"<sup>20</sup> is the concluding sentence of many of his most important utterances; all of which affords a clear proof that the work of the preservation and transmission of the Sunnah had begun in the lifetime of the Holy Prophet. This was the first stage in the collection of Hadith.

#### **Collection of Hadith: Second stage**

With the Holy Prophet's death, the work of the collection of Hadith entered on a second stage. Every case that came up for decision had now to be referred either to the Holy Qur'an or to some judgment or saying of the Holy Prophet, which judgments or sayings, therefore, obtained a wide reputation. There are numerous cases on record in which a right was claimed on the basis of a judgment or saying of the Holy Prophet, and evidence was demanded as to the authenticity of that saying.<sup>21</sup> Thus there was a double process at work: not only was the trustworthiness of the particular Hadith established beyond all doubt, but the Hadith also obtained a wide circulation, and from being the knowledge of one man only passed to that of many. The particular judgment might not be on all fours with the circumstances of the case to which it was applied, and an analogy might then be sought from one or more sayings. Thus the multiple needs of a rapidly growing and widely spreading community whose necessities had increased tenfold on account of its onward march to civilization, brought into prominence a large number of Hadith, knowledge of

which had been limited to one or a few only, with the seal of confirmation on their truth, because at that time direct evidence of that truth was available.

Yet this was not the only factor that gave an impetus to a dissemination of the knowledge of Hadīth. The influx into Islam of large numbers of people who had never seen the Holy Prophet himself, but who could behold for themselves the astounding transformation brought about by him, and to whom, therefore, his memory was, in the highest degree, sacred, formed in itself an important factor in the general eagerness to discover everything which the great man had said or done. It was natural that each new convert should be anxious to know all there was to know about the Great Prophet who had given quite a new life to a dead world. Everyone who had seen him would thus be a centre to whom hundreds of enquirers would resort, and since the incidents were fresh in their memories, they would be conveyed with fair accuracy to the new generation. It must not be forgotten that the wonderful success which Islam achieved within so short a time, and the rapidity with which the reputation of the Holy Prophet advanced, were the very reasons which led to the preservation of the true facts concerning him. Not only had he and his religion assumed an unparalleled importance in Arabia, within twenty years of the day on which he began the work of a reformer, but within ten years of his death they had already become the most important of world factors, and everything relating to him was a matter of discussion among Arabs and non-Arabs, friends and foes. Had he remained in oblivion for a century or so, and then risen to fame, probably much of what he had said or done would have been lost to the world, and the exaggerations of a later generation would have been handed down to posterity instead of facts. But with him the case was quite different. From the humblest position he had risen to the highest eminence to which man can rise, and that in less than a quarter of a century, and, therefore, not an incident of his life but had become public property before it could be forgotten. Such were the needs of the new times upon which Islam had entered after the death of the Holy Prophet.

There was another factor of the utmost importance which gave



impetus to the knowledge of Hadīth at this stage. To the Companions of the Holy Prophet, the religion which he had brought was a priceless jewel; a thing which they valued above all else the world contained. For its sake they had given up their business, their kinsfolk, nay, their very homes; to defend it they had laid down their lives. To carry this Divine blessing, this greatest gift of God, to other people, had become the supreme object of their lives; hence a dissemination of its knowledge was their first and foremost concern. In addition to this, the Great Master had laid on those who were present, on those who saw him and listened to his words, the duty of carrying what they saw and heard, to those who were absent, to those who came after him. *Li-yuballigh al-shāhid al-ghā'ib* was the phrase which on account of the frequency of its repetition rang continually in their ears: *Let him who is present carry this to him who is absent*. And they were faithful to the great charge which was laid on them. They went eastward and westward and northward, and in whichever direction they went, and to whichever country they went, they carried with them the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Everyone of them who had but the knowledge of one incident relating to the Prophet's life deemed it his duty to deliver it to another. And individuals like Abū Hurayrah, 'Ā'ishah, 'Abdullāh b. 'Abbās, 'Abdullāh b. 'Umar, 'Abdullāh b. 'Amr, Anas b. Mālīk and many others who had made the preservation of Sunnah the first object of their lives, had become, as it were, centres, to whom people resorted from different quarters of the kingdom of Islam to gain knowledge of the Prophet and of his religion. Their places of residence became in fact so many colleges for the dissemination of the knowledge of Hadīth. Abū Hurayrah alone had eight hundred disciples. 'Ā'ishah's house, too, was resorted to by hundreds of ardent pupils. The reputation of 'Abdullāh b. 'Abbās was equally great, and, notwithstanding his youth, he had a foremost place among the counsellors of 'Umar, on account of his knowledge of the Qur'an and the Sunnah. The zeal of the new generation for the acquisition of religious knowledge was so great that students were wont to travel from one place to another to complete their knowledge of the Sunnah, and some would journey long distances to obtain first-hand

information about one Hadīth only.<sup>22</sup> Thus arrangements existed both for the collection of the knowledge of Hadīth in different centres of learning, and for the spread of it far and wide through the disciples who gained their knowledge at such centres.

### **Collection of Hadīth: Third stage**

With the passing of the generation that had seen and heard the Holy Prophet directly, the work of the collection of Hadīth entered upon a third stage. There were no more reports to be investigated from different persons, and the whole of Hadīth was now the property of the different teachers who taught at different centres. There is no doubt that there was no single centre at which the whole store of the knowledge of Hadīth could be obtained, for the Companions of the Holy Prophet had spread far and wide. But in the second stage Hadīth had undoubtedly passed from individual into public possession, and, therefore, in the third stage the whole of Hadīth could be learned by repairing to the different centres instead of enquiring about it from individuals. At this stage, moreover, the writing of Hadīth became more common. The large number of the students of Hadīth at the different centres, having abundance of material to digest, to which was also added the further difficulty of remembering the names of the transmitters, sought aid from the pen, so that the work might be easier. By this time writing had become general and writing material abundant. Moreover, there was now no fear of the Hadīth being confused with the Qur'an. It must, however, be remembered that at this stage Hadīth was written merely as an aid to memory; the mere fact that a written Hadīth was found among the manuscripts of a person was no evidence of its authenticity, which could only be established by tracing it to a reliable transmitter. 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz, commonly known as 'Umar II, the Umayyad Caliph, who ruled towards the close of the first century of Hijrah, was the first man who issued definite orders to the effect that written collections of Hadīth should be made. He is reported to have written to Abū Bakr b. Hazm:

See whatever saying of the Holy Prophet can be found, and write it down, for I fear the loss of knowledge and the disappearance of the learned men; and do not accept anything but the Hadīth of the Holy Prophet; and people should make knowledge public and should sit in companies, so that he who does not know should come to know, for knowledge does not disappear until it is concealed from the public.<sup>23</sup>

The importance of this incident lies in the fact that the Caliph himself took an interest in the collection of Hadīth, the Umayyads generally having stood aloof from the great work up to this time. Abū Bakr b. Hazm was the Caliph's Governor at Madīnah, and there is evidence that similar letters were written to other centres.<sup>24</sup> But 'Umar II died after a short reign of two and a half years, and his successor does not seem to have interested himself at all in the matter. Even if a collection had been made in pursuance of these orders, which is very doubtful, no copy has reached us.<sup>25</sup> But the work was taken up independently of government patronage in the next century, and this brings us down to the fourth stage in the collection of Hadīth.

#### **Collection of Hadīth: Fourth stage**

Before the middle of the second century, Hadīth began to assume a more permanent shape, and written collections to see the light of day. Hundreds of the students of Hadīth were engaged in the work of learning it in the various centres, but with every new teacher and student the work of preserving the name of the transmitter along with the Hadīth itself was becoming more difficult. Written collections of Hadīth had thus become indispensable. The first known work on the subject is that of Imam 'Abd al-Mālik b. 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Jurayj, commonly known as Ibn Jurayj. According to some, however, Sa'īd b. Abī 'Arūbah or Rabī' b. Suhayb has precedence in this matter. All these authors died about the middle of the second century. Ibn Jurayj lived at Makkah, while other authors who wrote books on Hadīth in the second century are Imam Mālik b. Anas and Sufyān b. 'Uyaynah in Madīnah, 'Abdullāh b. Wahb in Egypt, Ma'mar and 'Abd al-Razāq in Yemen, Sufyān Thawrī and Muḥammad b. Fuzayl

in Kūfah, Hammād b. Salmah and Rauḥ b. 'Ubādah in Basrah, Hushaym in Wāsīt and 'Abdullāh b. Mubārak in Khurāsān, by far the most important of the collections of these authors being the *Muwatta'* of Imam Mālik. All these books, however, were far from being exhaustive writings on Hadīth. In the first place, the object of their compilation was simply the collection of such reports as touched on the daily life of the Muslims. Reports relating to a large number of topics, such as faith, or knowledge, or the life of the Prophet, or wars, or comments on the Qur'an, were outside their scope. And secondly, every author collected only such reports as were taught at the centre at which he worked. Even the *Muwatta'* which, as far as reliability is concerned, stands in the first rank with al-Bukhārī and Muslim, contains only the Hadīth which came through the people of Hijāz. All these works on Hadīth were, therefore, incomplete, but they were a great advance on oral transmission in the work of collecting Hadīth.

### Collection of Hadīth: Fifth stage

This great work was brought to completion in the third century of Hijrah. It was then that two kinds of collections of Hadīth were made, the *Musnad* and the *Jāmi'* or the *Musannaf*. The *Musnad* was the earlier type and the *Jāmi'* the later. *Musnad* is derived from *sanad* meaning *authority*, and the *Isnād* of a Hadīth meant the tracing of it back through various transmitters to the Companion of the Holy Prophet on whose authority it rested. The collections of Hadīth known as *Musnads* were arranged, not according to the subject-matter of the Hadīth, but under the name of the Companion on whose final authority the Hadīth rested. The most important of the works of this class is the *Musnad* of Imam Aḥmad b. Hanbal, which contains about thirty thousand reports. Aḥmad was born in 164 A.H. and died in 241 A.H., and is one of the four recognized Imams. His collection, however, contains reports of all sorts. It is to the *Jāmi'* (lit. *one that gathers together*) or the *Musannaf* (lit. *compiled*)

together) that the honour is due of bringing the knowledge of Ḥadīth to perfection. The *Jāmi'* not only arranges reports according to their subject-matter, but is also of a more critical tone. Six books are recognized by the *Ahl al-Sunnah* generally under the heading, being the collections made by Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl,<sup>26</sup> commonly known as al-Bukhārī, (d. 256 A.H.), Muslim (d. 261 A.H.), Abū Dāwūd (d. 275 A.H.), Tirmidhī (d. 279 A.H.), Ibn Mājah (d. 283 A.H.) and Nasā'ī (d. 303 A.H.). The works of the third and the last two are more generally known by the name of *Sunan* (pl. of *Sunnah*). These books classified reports under various heads and thus made Ḥadīth easy for reference, not only for the judge and the lawyer but also for the ordinary and the research student, thus giving a further impetus to the study of Ḥadīth. The Shi'ahs recognize the following five collections of Ḥadīth:

1. The *Kāfī* by Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb (329 A.H.);
2. *Man lā yastihzau-hu al-Faqīh* by Shaykh 'Alī (381 A.H.);
3. The *Tahdhīb* by Shaykh Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. Husayn (466 A.H.);
4. The *Istibṣār* by the same author;
5. The *Nahj al-Balāghah* by Sayyid al-Rāzī (406 A.H.).

It will be seen that all these collections are of a much later date.

### Al-Bukhārī

It may be noted here that among the six collections of Ḥadīth mentioned above, which are known as the *Ṣiḥāh Sittah* or the six reliable collections, *al-Bukhārī* holds the first place in several respects while *Muslim* comes second, and the two together are known as the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* or the two reliable books. In the first place, al-Bukhārī has the unquestioned distinction of being first, all the others modelling their writings on his. Secondly, he is the most critical of all.<sup>27</sup> He did not accept any Ḥadīth unless all its transmitters were reliable and until there was proof that the later transmitter had actually met the first, the mere fact that the two were contemporaries (which is Muslim's test) did not satisfy him. Thirdly,

in his *fiqāha*, or acumen, he surpasses all. Fourthly, he heads the more important of his chapters with a text from the Holy Qur'an, and thus shows that Hadīth is only an explanation of the Qur'an, and as such a secondary source of the teachings of Islam.

### Method of counting different reports

European critics of Hadīth are generally under the impression that when the authors of the *Musannafāt* set to work, there was a vast mass of spurious Hadīth, that the collectors did not credit more than one or two per cent of the prevailing mass as being genuine, and that these were taken to be genuine on the slender authority of the reliability of transmitters without any regard to the subject-matter of the Hadīth. The impression that the vast mass of reports taught at the different centres in the third century was fabricated is based on a misconception. It is true that it is related of al-Bukhārī that he took cognizance of 600,000 reports and knew some 200,000 of these by heart. It is also true that his book contains no more than 9,000 Hadīths. But it is not true that he found the other 591,000 reports to be false or fabricated.<sup>28</sup> It must be clearly understood that those who were engaged in the dissemination and study of Hadīth looked upon every report as a different Hadīth when even a single transmitter of the Hadīth was changed. Let us, for instance, take a Hadīth for which the original authority is Abū Hurayrah. Now Abū Hurayrah had 800 disciples in Hadīth, and the same Hadīth may have been reported by ten of his disciples with or without any variation. Each of these reports would, according to the collectors of Hadīth, form a separate Hadīth. Again, suppose each of the transmitters of Abū Hurayrah's Hadīth had two reporters, and the same Hadīth will count say 20 different reports, and the number would thus go on increasing as the number of reporters increased. Now at the time when al-Bukhārī applied himself to Hadīth in the first decade of the third century of Hijrah, there were schools of Hadīth at different centres, and hundreds of students learned Hadīth at these schools and reported them to others. In a chain of ordinarily four or five transmitters, consider the number of reports that would arise from

the same Hadīth on account of the variation of transmitters, and it is easy to understand that 600,000 did not mean so many reports relating to various subjects, but so many reports coming through different transmitters, many of them referring to the same incident or conveying the same subject-matter with or without variation of words. That this was the method of al-Bukhārī's counting of reports is clear from his book, the *Sahīh al-Bukhari*, which with the change of even one transmitter in a chain of, say, four or five, considers the report to be distinct.<sup>29</sup> What is called repetition in *al-Bukhārī* is due to this circumstance.

### Report in biographies and commentaries

European criticism of Hadīth has often mixed up Hadīth with the reports met within in the biographies of the Holy Prophet and in the commentaries on the Holy Qur'an. No Muslim scholar has ever attached the same value to the biographical reports as Hadīth narrated in the above-mentioned collections. On the other hand, all Muslim critics recognize that the biographers never made much effort to sift truth from error. Imam Aḥmad b. Hanbal sums up the Muslim point of view as regards the trustworthiness of the biographical reports when he declares that the biographies "are not based on any principle",<sup>30</sup> and Hāfiẓ Zayn al-Dīn al-'Irāqī says that "they contain what is true and what is false." In fact, much of the adverse European criticism of Hadīth would have been more suitably levelled at the biographical reports, and the same is true of the reports met with in the commentaries which are still more unreliable. Many careless commentators confounded Hadīth with Jewish and Christian stories, and made free use of the latter as if they were so many reports. As Ibn Khaldūn, speaking of the commentaries, says:

Their books and their reports contain what is bad and what is good and what may be accepted and what should be rejected, and the reason of this is that the Arabs were an ignorant race without literature and without knowledge, and desert life and ignorance were their chief characteristics, and whenever they desired as mortals do desire to obtain knowledge of the cause of existence and the origin of creation

and the mysteries of the universe, they turned for information to the followers of the Book, the Jews and such of the Christians as practised their faith. But these people of the Book were like themselves, and their knowledge of these things went no further than the knowledge of the ignorant masses... So when these people embraced Islam, they retained their stories which had no connection with the commandments of the Islamic law, such as the stories of the origin of creation, and things relating to the future and the wars etc. These people were like Ka'b Aḥbār, and Wāḥb b. Munabbāḥ and 'Abdullāh b. Salām and others. Commentaries on the Holy Qur'an were soon filled with these stories of theirs. And in such like matters, the reports do not go beyond them, and as these do not deal with commandments, so their correctness is not sought after to the extent of acting upon them, and the commentators take them rather carelessly, and they have thus filled up their commentaries with them.<sup>31</sup>

Shāh Walīyullāh writes in a similar strain:

And it is necessary to know that most of the Israelite stories that have found their way into the commentaries and histories are copied from the stories of the Jews and the Christians, and no commandment or belief can be based upon them.<sup>32</sup>

In fact, in some of the commentaries, the reports cited are puerile nonsense. Even the commentary of Ibn Jarīr, with all its value as a literary production, cannot be relied upon. Ibn Kathīr's commentary is, however, an exception, as it contains chiefly the Hadīth taken from reliable collections.

### **Story-tellers**

Yet another thing to beware of in a discussion on Hadīth is the mixing up of Hadīth with stories related by story-tellers. As in every other nation, there had grown up among the Muslims a class of fable-mongers whose business it was to tickle the fancies of the masses by false stories. These were either taken up from the Jews, Christians and Persians, with whom the Muslims came in contact, or they were simply concocted. The professional story-tellers were



called the *qussās* (pl. of *qāss*, and derived from *qassa*, meaning he related a story), and they seem to have sprung up early, for as al-Rāzī says, the Caliph 'Alī ordered that whosoever should relate the story of David as the story-tellers (*qussas*) relate it (the reference being to the story taken from the Bible as to David having committed adultery with Uriah's wife), should be given 160 stripes, that being double the punishment of the ordinary slanderer.<sup>33</sup> This shows that the story-teller had begun his work even at that early date, but then it must be remembered that the story-teller was never confounded with the reporter of Hadīth, even by the ignorant masses. His vocation, being of a lower status, was necessarily quite distinct. Hadīth was regularly taught in schools in the different centres, as I have already shown, and its teachers were in the first instance well-known Companions of the Holy Prophet, such as Abū Hurayrah, Ibn 'Umar, 'Ā'ishah, whose place was later on taken by equally well-known masters of Hadīth from among the *Tābi'in* (the successors of the Companions). No story teller, whose sphere of action was limited to some street corner, where he might attract the attention of passers-by and perhaps gather round him a few loiterers, could aspire even to approach a school of Hadīth. As a writer quoted by Guillaume (on p.82 of his book) says:

They collect a great crowd of people round them: one *Qāss* stations himself at one end of the street and narrates traditions about the merits of 'Alī, while his fellow stands at the other end of the street exalting the virtues of Abū Bakr. Thus they secure the pence of the Nāsibī as well as the Shi'ah, and divide their gains equally afterwards.

It is difficult to believe that such beggars and braggarts could be mistaken for reporters of Hadīth by any sensible person; yet even scholars like Sir William Muir and other famous Orientalists often try to confound the two, and speak of these stories as though they had some connection with Hadīth. Even if it be true that some of them have found a place in certain commentaries, whose authors had a love for the carious and gave but scant heed to the sifting of truth from error the *Muhaddīthūn*, that is, the collectors of Hadīth, would never dream of accepting a story from such a source. They knew the

story-tellers and their absurdities well enough, and indeed so scrupulous were they in making their selections that they would not accept a report if one of the reporters was known ever to have told a lie or fabricated a report<sup>34</sup> in a single instance. This much every European critic of Hadīth must needs admit; how then could such people accept the puerile inventions of the street story-teller who, it was well-known, followed his vocation merely and openly for the few coins it might bring. That there are some incredible stories even in the collections of Hadīth is perfectly true, but they are so rare that not the least discredit can justly be thrown on the collections themselves on that account, the reason for their existence being something quite different.

### European criticism of Hadīth

Among all European critics, almost without exception, there is a prevalent idea that Muslim critics of Hadīth have never gone beyond the transmission line, and that the subject-matter of Hadīth has been left quite untouched. Suggestions have also been made that even the Companions of the Holy Prophet were at times so unscrupulous as to fabricate Hadīth, while it should be common knowledge that the strictest Muslim critics of the transmitters are all agreed that when a Hadīth is traced back to a Companion of the Holy Prophet, its authenticity has been placed beyond all question. In the chapter on 'Criticism of Hadīth by Muslims,' Guillaume makes the suggestion that Abū Hurayrah was in the habit of fabricating Hadīth:

A most significant recognition within Hadīth itself of the untrustworthiness of guarantors is to be found in al-Bukhārī. Ibn 'Umar reports that Muḥammad ordered all dogs to be killed save sheep-dogs and hounds. Abū Hurayrah added the word *au zar'in*; whereupon Ibn 'Umar makes the remark, 'Abū Hurayrah owned cultivated land!' A better illustration of the underlying motive of some Hadīth can hardly be found.<sup>35</sup>

The word *zar'in* in the above quotation means cultivated land, and the suggestion is that Abū Hurayrah added this word for

personal motives. In the first place, Abū Hurayrah is not alone in reporting that dogs may be kept for hunting as well as for keeping watch over sheep or tillage (*zar'*). Al-Bukhārī reports a Hadīth from Sufyān b. Abī Zubayr in the following words:

I heard the Messenger of Allah, may peace and the blessings of Allah be upon him, saying, 'Whoever keeps a dog which does not serve him in keeping watch over cultivated land or goats, one *qirāt* of his reward is diminished everyday.' The man who reported from him said, 'Hast thou heard this from the Messenger of Allah?' He said, 'Yea, by the Lord of this Mosque.'<sup>36</sup>

Now this report clearly mentions watch dogs kept for sheep as well as those kept for tillage, but not dogs kept for hunting, which the Holy Qur'an explicitly allows (5:4). Abū Hurayrah's report in the same chapter, preceding that cited above, expressly mentions all these kinds, watch dogs for sheep or tillage and dogs for hunting, which only shows that Abū Hurayrah had the more retentive memory. And as for Ibn 'Umar's remark, there is not the least evidence that it contained any insinuation against Abū Hurayrah's integrity. It may be just an explanatory remark, or a suggestion that Abū Hurayrah took care to preserve that part of the saying, because he himself had to keep watch dogs for his cultivated land. With all the mistakes that Abū Hurayrah may have made in reporting so many Hadīths, no critic has ever yet questioned his integrity; in fact, critics are unanimous in maintaining that no Companion of the Holy Prophet ever told a lie. Thus Ibn Hajar says: "The *Ahl al-Sunnah* are unanimous that all (the Companions) are '*adūl*', i.e., truthful."<sup>37</sup> The word '*adāla*', as used regarding transmitters of reports, means that there has been no intentional deviation from the truth, and this is not due merely to the respect in which the Companions are held, for the critics of the transmitters of Hadīth never spared any one simply because he held a place of honour in their hearts.

Further on in the same chapter Guillaume asserts that independent thinkers in the second and third century not only questioned the authority of Hadīth altogether, but derided the very system:

However, there was still a large circle outside the orthodox thinkers who rejected the whole system of Hadīth. They were not concerned to adopt those which happened to fit in with the views and doctrines of the doctors, or even with those which might fairly be held to support their own view of life. So far from being impressed by the earnestness of the traditionists who scrupulously examined the *Isnād*, or by the halo of sanctity which had gathered round the early guarantors of tradition, the independent thinkers of the second and third centuries openly mocked and derided the system as a whole and the persons and matters named therein.<sup>38</sup>

And as evidence in support of these sweeping statements, he adds:

Some of the most flagrant examples of these lampoons will be found in the Book of Songs, where indecent stories are cast into the form in which tradition was customarily handed down to posterity.<sup>39</sup>

Thus the "independent thinkers" who rejected the system of Hadīth and "openly mocked and derided the system as a whole" are only the lampooners mentioned in the concluding portion of the paragraph. The *Aghānī*,<sup>40</sup> the Book of Songs, which is referred to as if it were a collection of lampoons directed against Hadīth, is an important collection of ballads by the famous Arabian historian, Abū al-Faraj 'Alī b. Husayn, commonly known as al-Isfahānī (born in 284 A.H.). I am at a loss to understand why the learned author of the Traditions of Islam should look upon it as an attempt to mock and deride the system of Hadīth. There may be some indecent stories connected with these songs, but the presence of such stories does not alter the essential character of the work which is in the nature of an historical collection.<sup>41</sup> Neither in the book itself nor in any earlier writing is there a word to show that the collection was made in a spirit of mockery; and as to the fact that with the songs collected are given the names of those through whom the songs were handed down, that was the common method adopted in all historical writings and collections of the time, as may be readily seen by reference to the historical writings of Ibn Sa'd, or Ibn Jarīr; and it was chosen

not to insult the method of transmission of Hadīth but simply on account of its historical value. Guillaume has also mentioned the names of two great Muslim thinkers, Ibn Qutaybah and Ibn Khaldūn in this connection, but they neither rejected the Hadīth system as a whole, nor ever mocked or derided that system or the persons and matters mentioned therein. Ibn Qutaybah rather defended the Qur'an and Hadīth against scepticism, and Guillaume has himself quoted with approval Dr. Nicholson's remarks that "every impartial student will admit the justice of Ibn Qutaybah's claim that no religion has such historical attestations as Islam — *"laysa li-ummatin mina'l-umami asnādun ka-asnādihim."*<sup>42</sup> The Arabic word *asnād* used in the original, and translated as historical attestations, is the plural of *sanad* which means an *authority*, and refers especially to the reporters on whose authority Hadīth is accepted. Thus Ibn Qutaybah claims for Hadīth a higher authority than any other history of the time, and the claim is admitted by both Nicholson and Guillaume. In the *Encyclopædia of Islam* it is plainly stated that Ibn Qutaybah "defended the Qur'an and Tradition against the attacks of philosophic scepticism." Ibn Khaldūn, too, never attacked Hadīth itself, and his strictures are applicable only to stories which have generally been rejected by the *Muhaddithin*.

### Canons of criticism of Hadīth as accepted by Muslims

There is no doubt that the collectors of Hadīth attached the utmost importance to the trustworthiness of the narrators. As Guillaume says:

Inquiries were made as to the character of the guarantors, whether they were morally and religiously satisfactory, whether they were tainted with heretical doctrines, whether they had a reputation for truthfulness, and had the ability to transmit what they had themselves heard. Finally, it was necessary that they should be competent witnesses whose testimony would be accepted in a court of civil law.<sup>43</sup>

More than this, they tried their best to find out that the report was traceable to the Holy Prophet through the various necessary stages.

Even the Companions of the Holy Prophet did not accept any Hadīth which was brought to their notice until they were fully satisfied that it came from the Holy Prophet. But the *Muhaddithūn* went beyond the narrators, and they had rules of criticism which were applied to the subject-matter of Hadīth. In judging whether a certain Hadīth was spurious or genuine, the collectors not only made a thorough investigation regarding the trustworthiness of the transmitters but also applied other rules of criticism which are in no way inferior to modern methods. Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīz has summarized these rules in the '*Ujālah Nāfi'ah*', and according to them a report was not accepted under any of the following circumstances:

1. If it was opposed to recognized historical facts.
2. If the reporter was a Shi'ah and the Hadīth was of the nature of an accusation against the Companions of the Holy Prophet, or if the reporter was a Khārijī and the Hadīth was of the nature of an accusation against a member of the Prophet's family. If, however, such a report was corroborated by independent testimony, it was accepted.
3. If it was of such a nature that to know it and act upon it was incumbent upon all, and it was reported by a single man.
4. If the time and the circumstances of its narration contained evidence of its forgery.<sup>44</sup>
5. If it was against reason<sup>45</sup> or against the plain teachings of Islam.<sup>46</sup>
6. If it mentioned an incident, which, had it happened, would have been known to and reported by large numbers, while as a matter of fact that incident was not reported by any one except the particular reporter.
7. If its subject-matter or words were *rakik* (i.e., unsound or incorrect); for instance, the words were not in accordance with Arabic idiom, or the subject-matter was unbecoming the Prophet's dignity.
8. If it contained threatenings of heavy punishment for ordinary sins or promises of mighty reward for slight good deeds.
9. If it spoke of the reward of prophets and messengers to the doer.

of good.

10. If the narrator confessed that he fabricated the report.

Similar rules of criticism are laid down by Mullāh 'Alī Qārī in his work entitled *Mawdū'āt*, and by Ibn al-Jawzī for which see the *Fath al-Mughūth*, as well as by Ibn Hajar for which see *Nuzhat al-Nazar*.

### The Qur'an as the greatest test for judging Ḥadīth

In addition to these rules of criticism, which I think leave little to be desired, there is another very important test whereby the trustworthiness of Ḥadīth may be judged, and it is a test the application whereof was commanded by the Holy Prophet himself. He is reported to have said:

There will be narrators reporting Ḥadīth from me, so judge by the Qur'an; if a report agrees with the Qur'an, accept it; otherwise, reject it.

The genuineness of this Ḥadīth is beyond all question, as it stands on the soundest basis.<sup>47</sup>

That Ḥadīth was in vogue in the time of the Holy Prophet is a fact admitted by even European critics, as I have already shown, and that the authority of the Qur'an was higher than that of Ḥadīth appears from numerous circumstances. the Prophet is reported to have said according to a very reliable Ḥadīth:

I am no more than a man. When I order you anything respecting religion receive it, and when I order anything about the affairs of the world, I am no more than a man.<sup>48</sup>

There is another saying of his:

My sayings do not abrogate the word of Allah, but the word of Allah can abrogate my sayings.<sup>49</sup>

The *Ḥadīth* relating to Mu'ādh which has been quoted elsewhere,<sup>50</sup> places the Holy Qur'an first, and after that *Ḥadīth*. 'Ā'ishah used to repeat a verse of the Holy Qur'an on hearing words from the mouth of the Holy Prophet when she thought that the purport of what the Prophet said did not agree with the Holy Qur'an. The great Imam al-Bukhārī quotes a verse of the Holy Qur'an whenever he finds one suiting his text, before citing a *Ḥadīth*, thus showing that the Qur'an holds precedence over *Ḥadīth*, and by common consent of the Muslim community, *al-Bukhārī*, which is considered to be the most trustworthy of all collections of *Ḥadīth*, is looked upon as *asahh al-kutubi ba'da Kitāb-Allāh*, or the most reliable of books after the Book of God. This verdict of the community as a whole is proof enough that even if *al-Bukhārī* disagrees with the Qur'an, it is *al-Bukhārī* that must be rejected and not the Book of God. And as has already been stated at the commencement of this chapter, *Ḥadīth* is only an explanation of the Qur'an, and hence also the Qur'an must have precedence over the *Ḥadīth*. And last of all, both Muslim and non-Muslim historians are agreed that the Holy Qur'an has been handed down intact, every word and every letter of it, while *Ḥadīth* cannot claim that purity, as it was chiefly the substance of sayings that was reported.

All these considerations show that the saying that *Ḥadīth* must be judged by the Holy Qur'an is quite in accordance with the teachings of the Holy Prophet, and there is really no ground for doubting its genuineness. Even if there were no such *Ḥadīth*, the test therein suggested would still have been the right test, because the Holy Qur'an deals with the principles of the Islamic law while *Ḥadīth* deals with its details, and it is just and reasonable that only such details should be accepted as are in consonance with the principles. Again, as the Prophet is plainly represented in the Holy Qur'an as not following "aught save that which is revealed" to him (6:50; 7:203; 46:9), and as not disobeying a word of that which was revealed to him (6:15; 10:15), it follows clearly that if there is anything in *Ḥadīth* which is not in consonance with the Holy Qur'an, it could not have proceeded from the Prophet and hence must be rejected.



### How far the *Muhaddithūn* apply these tests

But the question arises: did all the collectors of the Hadīth pay equal regard to the above canons of criticism? It is pretty clear that they did not. The earliest of them, al-Bukhārī is, by a happy coincidence, also the soundest of them. He was not only most careful in accepting the trustworthiness of the narrators of Hadīth, but he also paid the utmost attention to the last of the critical tests enumerated above, namely, the test of judging Hadīth by the Qur'an. Many of his books and chapters are headed by Qur'anic verses, and occasionally he has contented himself with a verse of the Qur'an in support of his text. This shows that his criticism of Hadīth was not limited to a mere examination of the guarantors as every European critic seems to think, but that he also applied other tests. The act of criticism was, of course, applied mentally and one should not expect a record of the processes of that criticism in the book itself. So with the other collectors of Hadīth. They followed the necessary rules of criticism but were not all equally careful, nor did they all possess equal critical acumen or experience. Indeed, they sometimes intentionally relaxed the rules of criticism, both as regards the examination of the narrators and the critical tests. They also made a distinction between Hadīth relating to matters of jurisprudence and other Hadīth, such as those having to do with past history or with prophecies, or with other material which had no bearing on the practical life of man.

We are clearly told that they were stricter in matters of jurisprudence than in other Hadīth. Thus Baihaqī says in the *Kitāb al-Madkhal*:

When we narrate from the Holy Prophet in what is allowed and what is prohibited, we are strict in the chain of transmission and in the criticism of the narrators, but when we relate reports on the merits of people, and about reward and punishment, we are lax in the line of transmission and overlook the defects of the narrators.

And Ahmad b. Hanbal says:

Ibn Ishāq is a man from whom such reports may be taken, i.e., those

which relate to *sīrah* (life of the Prophet), but when the question is about what is allowed and what is forbidden, we have recourse to a (strong) people like this,

and he inserted the fingers of one hand amid those of the other, conjoining the hands, and thus pointing to the strength of character of the transmitters.

It must, however, be admitted that most of the collectors of Hadīth paid more attention to the investigation of the narrators than to the other critical tests, and they were justified in this, for their object was to produce reliable collections of Hadīth, and, therefore, their first concern was to see that the Hadīth could be authentically traced back to the Holy Prophet through a trustworthy chain of narrators. This part of the criticism was the more essential, as the longer the chain of narrators, the more difficult would it have been to test their reliability. Other tests could be applied to any Hadīth at any time, and the lapse of a thousand years could in no way affect the value of these tests, but the passing away of another century would have rendered the task of the examination of the chain of narrators so-difficult as to be for all practical purposes impossible. Hence the collectors of Hadīth rightly focussed their attention on this test.

Nor did the work of collecting the Hadīth close the door to further criticism. The *Muhaddithūn* contented themselves with producing collections reliable in the main, and left the rest of the work of criticism to future generations. They never claimed faultlessness for their works; even al-Bukhārī did not do that. They exercised their judgments to the best of their ability, but they never claimed, nor does any Muslim claim on their behalf, infallibility of judgment. In fact, they had started a work which was to continue for generation after generation of the Muslims. If possible, a hundred more canons of criticism might be laid down, but it would still be the judgment of one man as to whether a certain Hadīth must be accepted or rejected. Every collection is the work of one *Muhaddith*, and even if ninety-nine per cent of his judgments are correct, there is still room for the exercise of judgment by others. The Western critic errs in thinking that infallibility is claimed for any of the

collections of Hadīth, and that the exercise of judgment by a certain *Muhaddith* precludes the exercise of judgment by others as to the reliability of a report.

We must also remember that however much the collectors of Hadīth might have differed in their judgments as to the necessity for rigour in the rules of criticism, they set to work with minds absolutely free from bias or external influence. They would lay down their lives rather than swerve a hair's breadth from what they deemed to be the truth. Many of the famous Imams preferred punishment or jail to uttering a word against their convictions. The fact is generally admitted as regards the Umayyad rule. As Guillaume says:

They laboured to establish the Sunnah of the community as it was, or as it was thought to have been, under the Prophet's rule, and so they found their bitterest enemies in the ruling house.<sup>51</sup>

The independence of thought of the great Muslim divines under the 'Abbāsid rule had not deteriorated in the least. They would not even accept office under a Muslim ruler; says Th. W. Juynboll in the *Encyclopædia of Islam*,

It is well-known that many pious, independent men in those days deemed it wrong and refused to enter the service of the Government or to accept an office dependent on it (p.91).

### Different classes of Hadīth

Ibn Hajar has dealt with different classes of Hadīth in the *Sharh Nukhbat al-Fikr* at great length. The most important division of Hadīth is into *mutawātīr* (continuous) and *ahād* (isolated). A Hadīth is said to be *mutawātīr* (lit. *repeated successively or by one after another*) when it is reported by such a large number that it is impossible that they should have agreed upon falsehood, so that the very fact that it is commonly accepted makes its authority unquestionable. To this category belong Hadīth that have been accepted by every Muslim generation down from the time of the

Holy Prophet.<sup>52</sup> The *mutawātir* Hadīth are accepted without criticizing their narrators. All other Hadīth are called *ahād* (pl. of *ahad* or *wāhid* meaning one, i.e., isolated). The *ahād* are divided into three classes, *mashhūr* (lit. *well-known*), technically Hadīth which are reported through more than two channels at every stage; *'azīz* (lit. *strong*), that is, Hadīth that are not reported through less than two channels; and *gharīb* (lit. *strange* or *unfamiliar*), namely Hadīth in whose link of narrators there is only a single person at any stage. It should be noted that in this classification the condition as to the Hadīth being narrated by more than two or two or less than two persons at any stage applies only to the three generations following the Companions of the Holy Prophet, i.e., the *Tābi'ūn* or *atbā' al-tābi'in*, or *atbā'u atbā'i'l-tābi'in*.

Of the two chief classes of Hadīth, the *mutawātir* and the *ahād*, the first are all accepted so far as the line of transmission is concerned, but the latter are further sub-divided into two classes, *maqbul* or those which may be accepted, and *mardūd*, or those which may be rejected. Those that are *maqbul*, or acceptable, are again sub-divided into two classes, *ṣaḥīh* (lit. *sound*), and *ḥasan* (lit. *fair*). The condition for a Hadīth being *ṣaḥīh* or sound is that its narrators are *'adl* (men whose sayings and decisions are approved or whom desire does not deviate from the right course), and *tamm al-zabt* (guarding or taking care of Hadīth effectually); that it is *muttasil al-sanad*, i.e., that the authorities narrating it should be in contact with each other, so that there is no break in the transmission; that it is *ghairu mu'allal* i.e., that there is no *'illah* or defect in it; and that it is not *shādhḥ* (lit. *a thing apart from the general mass*, i.e., against the general trend of Hadīth or at variance with the overwhelming evidence of other Hadīth). A Hadīth that falls short of this high standard, and fulfils the other conditions but does not fulfil the condition of its narrators being *tamm al-zabt* (guarding or taking care of Hadīth effectually), is called *ḥasan* or fair. Such a Hadīth is regarded as *ṣaḥīh* or sound when the deficiency of effectual guarding is made up for by the large number of its transmitters. A *ṣaḥīh* Hadīth is accepted unless there is stronger testimony to rebut what is stated therein.

I have already said that it is recognized by the *Muhaddithin* that a *Hadīth* may be unacceptable either because of some defect in its transmitters, or because its subject-matter is unacceptable. Thus Ibn Hajar says that among the reasons for which a *Hadīth* may be rejected is its subject-matter. For example, if a *Hadīth* contradicts the Holy Qur'an or recognized *Sunnah* or the unanimous verdict of the Muslim community or common-sense, it is not accepted. As regards defects in transmission, a *Hadīth* is said to be *marfū* when it is traced back to the Holy Prophet without any defect in transmission, *muttasal* when its *Isnād* is uninterrupted, *mawqūf* when it does not go back to the Prophet, *mu'an'an* (from 'an meaning from) when it is linked by a word which does not show personal contact between two narrators, and *mu'allaq* (suspended) when the name of one or more transmitters is missing (being *munqata* if the name is missing from the middle, and *mursal* if it is from the end).

#### NOTES

1. Hence the Holy Qur'an is also spoken of as *hadīth* (18:6; 39:23). The word *sunnah* is used in the Holy Qur'an in a general sense, meaning a way or rule. Thus *sunnat al-awwalīn* (8:38; 15:13; 18:55; 35:43) means the way or example of the former people, and is frequently used in the Holy Qur'an as signifying God's way of dealing with people, which is also spoken of as *sunnat-Allāh* or God's way. Once, however, the plural *sunan* is used as indicating the ways in which men ought to walk: "Allah desires to explain to you, and to guide you into the ways (*sunan*) of those before you." (4:26).
2. Shaykh Walī al-Dīn Muḥammad b. 'Abdullāh, *al-Mishkāt al-Masābiḥ*, *kitāb* 1, *bāb* 1, *faṣl* (sec.) i.
3. *Sahih al-Bukhārī*, k.3, b.25.
4. *Ibid.*, k.3, b.37.
5. Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, k.23, b.11.
6. Thus Muir writes in his introduction to the *Life of Mahomet*: "The Arabs, a simple and unsophisticated race, found in the Corān ample provisions for the regulation of their affairs, religious, social and political. But this aspect of Islam soon underwent a mighty change. Scarcely was the Prophet buried when his followers issued forth from their barren Peninsula resolved to impose the faith of Islam upon all the nations of the earth... Crowded cities, like Cufa.

Cairo and Damascus required elaborate laws for the guidance of their courts of justice: widening political relations demanded a system of international equity... All called loudly for the enlargement of the scanty and naked dogmas of the Revelation... The difficulty was resolved by adopting the custom ('Sunnat') of Mahomet; that is, his sayings and his practice as supplementary of the Coran... Tradition was thus invested with the force of law and with something of the authority of inspiration" (p. xxix). And even a recent writer Guillaume writes in the *Traditions of Islam*: "While the prophet was alive he was the sole guide in all matters whether spiritual or secular. Hadith, or tradition in the technical sense may be said to have begun at his death" (p.13).

7. Al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi'*, k.39, b.12.
8. Abū Dāwūd, *op. cit.*, k.24, b.3.
9. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, k.3, b.39.
10. *Ibid.*, k.24, b.39.
11. *Ibid.*, k.3, b.39.
12. *Ibid.*, k.3, b.39.
13. Thus Guillaume writes in the *Traditions of Islam*: "The hadith last quoted do not invalidate the statements that traditions were written down from the mouth of the prophet; the extraordinary importance attached to every utterance of his would naturally lead his followers who were able to write to record his words in order to repeat them to those who clamoured to know what he had said; and there is nothing at all in any demonstrably early writing to suggest that such a practice would be distasteful to Muhammad" (p.17).
14. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, k.34, b.1.
15. Abu-l-Fadzl Shahāb al-Dīn Ahmad b. 'Alī, *Fath al-Bārī* (Cairo), vol.I, p.191.
16. Baihaqī, *Kitāb al-Sunan*; and *Ibid.*
17. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, k.21, b.18.
18. *Ibid.*, k.3, b.35.
19. *Ibid.*, k.3, b.27.
20. *Ibid.*, k.3, b.37.
21. A Companion, Qabīṣah by name, reports that the grandmother of a deceased person came to Abū Bakr and claimed a right in inheritance. Abū Bakr said that he could not find either in the Book of God or the Sunnah of the Prophet that she was entitled to any share, but that he would make enquiries about it from others. In this enquiry, Mughīrah gave evidence that the Prophet gave the grandmother one-sixth of the property. Abū Bakr asked him to bring another witness in support of it, and Muhammad b. Maslamah appeared before Abū Bakr corroborating the evidence of Mughīrah. Judgment was

accordingly given in favour of the grandmother (see al-Tirmidhi, *op.cit.*, k.27, b.9; and Abū Dāwūd, *op.cit.*, k.18, b.5). Again, Fātimah, the Prophet's daughter, claimed that she was entitled to an inheritance from the Holy Prophet. As against this Abū Bakr cited a saying of the Holy Prophet: "We prophets do not leave an inheritance; whatever we leave is a charity." The truth of this Hadīth was not questioned by any one, and Fātimah's claim was rejected (see al-Bukhārī, *op.cit.*, k.85, b.2). Such incidents happened daily and became the occasion of establishing or otherwise the truth of many sayings of the Holy Prophet.

22. It is reported that Jābir b. 'Abdullāh travelled from Madīnah to Syria for the sake of a single Hadīth (see Ahmad b. 'Alī, *op.cit.*, vol.I, p.158). It was a month's journey as Jābir himself states (al-Bukhārī, *op.cit.*, k.3, b.19). Al-Bukhārī's famous commentary, *Fath al-Bārī* relates several incidents of the same type. Abū Ayyūb Ansārī, for instance, is related to have undertaken a long journey to hear a saying of the Holy Prophet from 'Aqabah b. 'Āmir. Sa'īd b. Musaiyab is reported to have said that he used to travel for days and nights in search of a single Hadīth. Another Companion of the Holy Prophet is said to have undertaken a journey to Egypt for the sake of one Hadīth. The zeal of the next generation was equally great. Abu al-'Āliyah is reported to have said: "We heard of a Hadīth of the Holy Prophet but we were not satisfied until we went to the Companion concerned in person and heard it from him direct" (see Ahmad b. 'Alī, *op.cit.*, vol.1, p.159). Abū Dāwūd reports that Abū al-Dardā' was sitting in a mosque in Damascus when a man came to him and questioned him about a Hadīth, saying at the same time that he had come for no other object but the verification of a Hadīth which he (Abu al-Dardā') related (Abū Dāwūd, *op.cit.*, k.24, b.1).
23. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, k.3, b.34.
24. Ahmad b. 'Alī, *op.cit.*, vol.1, p.174.
25. Guillaume thinks that the issuing of orders by 'Umar II for the collection of Hadīth is a later invention. The reason given by him is that no such collection has come down to us, nor is there any mention of it in any other work. But as I have pointed out, the reason for any such collection not being made, if really it has not disappeared, was the shortness of 'Umar's reign and the indifference of the other Umayyad Caliphs. Another reason given is that the name of Ibn Shāhāb al-Zuhrī is, according to one report, connected with this order. But this rather confirms the authenticity of 'Umar's orders, because, as I have said before, the orders were circular. Muir is right when he says: "About a hundred years after Mahomet, the Caliph Omar II issued circular orders for the formal collection of all extant tradition. The task, thus begun, continued to be rigorously prosecuted" (*Life of Mahomet*, intro. p.xxx).

26. Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī was born at Bukhārā in 194 A.H. He began the study of Hadīth when only 11 years of age, and by the time that he was 16 had acquired a high reputation for his knowledge thereof. He had a wonderful memory, and the students of Hadīth used to correct their manuscripts by comparing them with what he recited from memory.
27. A modern writer, and one who has made a special study of Hadīth, expresses the following opinion about al-Bukhārī: "So far as one is able to judge, al-Bukhārī published the result of his researches into the content of what he believed to be genuine tradition with all the painstaking accuracy of a modern editor. Thus he records even trifling variants in the Hadīth, and wherever he feels that an explanatory gloss is necessary either in *Isnād* or *matn* it is clearly marked as his own" [Alfred Guillaume, *Traditions of Islam* (Oxford 1924), p.29].
28. Writing of al-Bukhārī, Guillaume says: "Tradition reports that this remarkable man took cognizance of 600,000 hadith, and himself memorized more than 200,000. Of these he has preserved to us 7,397, or, according to other authorities, 7,295. If one adds to these the fragmentary traditions embodied in the *tarjama*, the total is 9,082... When one reflects from these figures furnished by a Muslim historian that hardly more than one percent of the hadith said to be openly circulating with the authority of the prophet behind them were accounted genuine by the pious Bukhari, one's confidence in the authenticity of the residue is sorely tried. Where such an enormous preponderance of material is judged false, nothing but the successful application of modern canons of evidence can restore faith in the credibility of the remainder" (Guillaume, *op.cit.*, pp.28-29). And Muir says: "It is proved by the testimony of the Collectors themselves, that thousands and tens of thousands of traditions were current in their times which possessed not even the shadow of authority... Bokhary... came to the conclusion, after many years' sifting, that out of 600,000 traditions, ascertained by him to be then current, only 4,000 were authentic" (*Life of Mahomet*, intro. p.cxxxvii).
29. "On the other hand, the same tradition is often repeated more than once under different chapters (*Abwāb*), so that if repetitions are disregarded the number of distinct hadith is reduced to 2,762" (Guillaume, *op.cit.*, p.28).
30. Mullāh 'Alī Qārī, *Mawdū'āt* (Delhi 1315 A.H.), p.85.
31. Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddamah* (Cairo 1329 A.H.), vol.I, p.481, ch. '*Ulūm al-Qur'an*'.
32. Shāh Walīyullāh, *Hujjat-Allāh al-Bālighah* (Brailey 1286 A.H.), p.176, ch. '*I'tisām bi'l-Kitāb*'.
33. Muḥammad Fakhr al-Din Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* (1307 A.H.), vol.VII, p.187, 38:21-25.



34. In the *Sharḥ Nukhbat al-Fikr*, Ibn Hajar, while speaking of *ta'n* (i.e., accusation against a transmitter), says that if a transmitter is shown to have told a lie in transmitting a Ḥadīth, or even if he is accused of having told a lie, he is discredited (p.66).
35. Guillaume, *op.cit.*, p.78.
36. *Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, k.41, b.3.
37. Ahmad b. 'Alī, *Isābah fī Tamyiz al-Saḥābah* (Cairo 1323 A.H.), vol.I, p.6.
38. Guillaume, *op.cit.*, p.80.
39. *Ibid.*
40. *The Encyclopædia of Islam* speaks of the *Aghānī* in the following words: "His chief work, which alone has been preserved, is the great *Kitāb al-Aghānī*; in this he collected the songs which were popular in his time, adding the accounts of their authors and their origin which appeared of interest to him... With every song there is indicated, besides the text, the air according to the musical terminology... to these are added very detailed accounts concerning the poet, often also concerning composers and singers of both sexes. In spite of its unsystematic order this book is our most important authority not only for literary history till into the third century of the Hidjra, but also for the history of civilization" (Abu'l-Faradj).
41. There are indecent stories in some of the books of the Bible, but still the Bible does not cease to have a sacred character.
42. Guillaume, *op.cit.*, p.77.
43. *Ibid.*, p.83.
44. An example of this is met with in the following incident related in *Hayāt al-Hayawān*. Hārūn al-Rashīd loved pigeons. A pigeon was sent to him as a present. *Qādī* Abū al-Bakhtarī was sitting by him at the time, and to please the monarch he narrated a Ḥadīth to the effect that there should be no betting except in racing or archery or flying of birds. Now the concluding words were a forgery and the Caliph knew this. So when the *Qādī* was gone, he ordered the pigeon to be slaughtered, adding that the fabrication of this portion of the Ḥadīth was due to that pigeon. The collectors of Ḥadīth on that account did not accept any Ḥadīth of Abū al-Bakhtarī.
45. "Ibn 'Abd al-Barr (d. 463) and al-Nawawī (d. 676) do not hesitate to assail traditions which seem to them to be contrary to reason or derogatory to the dignity of the prophet" (Guillaume, *op.cit.*, p.94).
46. Examples of this are the Ḥadīth relating to *Qadā 'Umri*, i.e., going through the performance of the *rak'ahs* of daily prayers on the last Friday in the month of Ramadān as an atonement for not saying prayers regularly, or the Ḥadīth which says, "Do not eat melon until you slaughter it."

47. A Hadīth, however sound the statement it contains and however great the authority on which it is based, is readily condemned as a fabrication by European critics when it does not suit their canons of criticism. Thus Guillaume, after quoting the well-known Hadīth, which is reported by a very large number of Companions — so large that not the least doubt can be entertained as to its genuineness — "Whoever shall repeat of me that which I have not said, his resting-place shall be in hell," — remarks: "A study of the theological systems of the world would hardly reveal a more naïve attempt to tread the *ṣirāt al-mustaḳīm*" (Guillaume, *op.cit.*, p.79). Referring to the same Hadīth, the same author remarks: "In order to combat false traditions they invented others equally destitute of prophetic authority" (*Ibid.*, p.78). Such irresponsible remarks will befit a work of criticism. The genuineness of this Hadīth is beyond all doubt, and it has been accepted as such by collectors of reports. It cannot be denied that there are theological systems whose basic principles are the concoctions of pious men, but in Islam the very details are matters of history, and "pious lies" could not find here any ground whereon to prosper.
48. Shaykh Walī al-Dīn, *op. cit.*, k.1, b.6. f.i.
49. *Ibid.*, k.1, b.6, f.iii.
50. On being appointed Governor of Yemen, Mu'ādh was asked by the Holy Prophet as to the rule by which he would abide. "By the law of the Qur'an," he replied. "But if you do not find any direction therein," asked the Prophet. "Then I will act according to the Sunnah of the Prophet," was the reply. And the Holy Prophet approved of it (Abū Dāwūd, *op.cit.*, k.23, b.11).
51. Guillaume, *op. cit.*, p.42.
52. There is a difference of opinion as to the number of reporters of the *mutawātir* Hadīth, some considering four to be the minimum required, others five or seven or ten, others still raising it still further to forty or even seventy. But the commonly accepted opinion is that it is only the extensive acceptance of a Hadīth which raises it to the rank of *mutawātir*.

## ISNĀD AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

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MUHAMMAD MUSTAFĀ A'ZAMĪ

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### The Beginning of *Isnād*

It appears that *Isnād* was used casually in some literatures in the pre-Islamic period, in a vague manner, without attaching any importance to it. The *Isnād* system was also used — to some extent — in transmitting pre-Islamic poetry.<sup>1</sup> But it was in the Ḥadīth literature that its importance culminated till it was counted a part of the religion.<sup>2</sup> The advantage of the system was utilized to the full, and in some cases to extravagant limits, for documenting the Ḥadīth literature, the store room for the Sunnah. The Sunnah of the Prophet being the basic legal source, it was natural to deal with these documents with utmost care. Thus with the introduction of *Isnād*, a unique science, *ʿIlm al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dīl* came into existence for the valuation of *Isnād* and Ḥadīth.

It was the common practice among Companions even during the lifetime of the Prophet s.a.w. to transmit the Ḥadīths of the Prophet when they saw each other. Some of them had even made special arrangements to attend the Prophet's circle in shifts and to inform each other of what they had heard and seen in the presence of the

Prophet.

Naturally in informing their fellows they would have used sentences like 'the Prophet did so and so' or 'the Prophet said so and so'. It is also natural that one of them who had gained knowledge at second hand, while reporting the incident to a third man, might have disclosed his sources of information and might have given the full account of the incident. There are references of this kind in the Hadīth literature. I may quote here only one:

When Dimām b. Tha'labah came to the Prophet and said to him, "Muḥammad, your messenger came to us and told us .....",

These methods, which were used in the early days for the diffusion of the Sunnah of the Prophet, gave birth to *Isnād*, and this was the rudimentary beginning of this system.

In this regard Ibn Sīrīn's statement would be very helpful. He says:

They did not ask about the *Isnād*, but when civil war — *Fitnah* — arose they said 'Name to us your men'; those who belong to *Ahl al-Sunnah*, their traditions were accepted and those who were innovators their traditions were neglected.<sup>3</sup>

It gives the impression that the *Isnād* was used even before the *Fitnah*, but the narrators were not so perfect in applying it. Some times they employed it and at others neglected it, but after civil war they became more cautious and began to enquire about the sources of information and to scrutinize them. At the end of the first century the science of the *Isnād* was fully developed. Shu'bah used to watch the lips of Qatādah, in the lecture, to discriminate between his first and second-hand information. There are ample references to asking and enquiring about the *Isnād* in the first century of the Hijrah.

### Flourishing of *Isnād* in the later part

It is the common phenomenon of *Isnād* system that as we go further the number of transmitters increases. Sometimes a tradition

transmitted by one companion acquires ten students in the next generation, in the class of Successors, and in turn these ten students have in some cases twenty or thirty students belonging to different countries and provinces.

I give here two examples of the spread of *Isnād*.

Abū Hurayrah reported that the Prophet said when anyone amongst you wakes up from sleep, he must not put his hand in the utensil till he has washed it three times, for he does not know where his hand was during the sleeping.

At least thirteen students of Abū Hurayrah transmitted this from him.

- 8 out of 13 belong to Madīnah.
- 1 out of 13 belongs to Kūfah.
- 2 out of 13 belong to Basrah.
- 1 out of 13 belongs to Yemen.
- 1 out of 13 belongs to Syria.

There are sixteen scholars who transmitted this tradition from the students of Abū Hurayrah.

- 6 out of 16 belong to Madīnah.
- 4 out of 16 belong to Basrah.
- 2 out of 16 belong to Kūfah, Iraq.
- 1 out of 16 belongs to Makkah.
- 1 out of 16 belongs to Yemen.
- 1 out of 16 belongs to Khurāsān.
- 1 out of 16 belongs to Hims, Syria.

The common feature of a good many traditions in the early part of the second century A.H. is the great number of transmitters who belong to different provinces and countries as we have seen just now. It was hardly possible for all these persons to consult each other so as to give a similar form and sense in transmitting a particular tradition. So if a particular tradition is transmitted by so many persons with a similar form and sense, then its genuineness cannot be questioned, while the trustworthiness of the individuals has been

confirmed by their contemporaries. It is general practice that if a man's honesty is proved by his dealing with the people, then his words are accepted as a true statement unless it is proved otherwise by facts. For the past generation with whom personal contact is impossible one needs to rely to a large extent on the testimony of contemporary sources. The standard fixed by the *Muhaddithīn* from the very early days was that if someone tells a lie in his personal life, though he was honest in the transmitting of Hadīth, his Hadīths would not be accepted.<sup>4</sup> They criticised their fathers, brothers, friends and close relatives. And, perhaps, it was the highest possible standard that could be set for documentation of any source. Therefore, there is no good reason to reject the testimony of the contemporaries.

Furthermore, the Hadīth literature still offers an opportunity to satisfy one. The other method to test their trustworthiness and honesty in certain cases is by cross references to the statements of scholars. The method was employed by *Muhaddithīn* in early days.

The same method can be utilized to compare the statements of later authorities; then going one step back to compare their teachers' statements till we reach the Prophet. If in a number of cases this method works and gives satisfactory results, it will provide confidence as a whole in the Hadīth literature. In my work, *Studies in Early Hadīth Literature*, it has been shown positively, that there is more than sufficient grounds to accept the Hadīth literature as a whole. The study also indicates the early beginning of the *Isnād* system in Hadīth. Abū Hurayrah died in 58 A.H. or thereabouts, but there are other Companions who died earlier than Abū Hurayrah and their traditions are also transmitted through *Isnād*. As it is found in many cases that 5, 6, 10 or more students belonging to different countries transmit a tradition from one Companion and they provide *Isnād* going back to the Prophet, their statement should be accepted as authentic. We even find that some early Companions, e.g., 'Umar and 'Uthmān, etc., transmitted traditions giving as their immediate authorities not the Prophet but some other Companions. Had the system of *Isnād* not existed, it would not have been possible for them to transmit in this way.

### Orientalists and *Isnād*

Among the orientalist there have been differences of opinion about the beginning of *Isnād* and its value. According to Caetani, Urwah (d. 94 A.H.), the oldest systematic collector of traditions, as quoted by al-Tabarī, used no *Isnād* and quoted no authority but the Qur'an. He therefore, holds that in the time of 'Abd al-Mālik (cr. 70-80 A.H.), more than sixty years after the Prophet's death, the practice of giving *Isnād* did not exist. So he concludes that the beginning of the *Isnād* system may be placed in the period between Urwah and Ibn Ishāq (d. 151 A.H.). In his opinion the greater part of the *Isnād* was put together and created by traditionists of the end of the second century (A.H.), and perhaps also of the third.<sup>5</sup>

Sprenger has also pointed out that the writing of Urwah to 'Abd al-Mālik does not contain *Isnād* and only later on he was credited with it.<sup>6</sup> The quotations from the writing of Urwah to 'Abd al-Mālik are not only preserved in Ṭabarī but in many classical collections of Ḥadīth as well<sup>7</sup> which are earlier than Ṭabarī. In one of the quotations, through the same *Isnād* which are utilized by al-Ṭabarī, we find Urwah quoting his authority 'Ā'ishah.<sup>8</sup> In other places he quotes other Companions and Successors. The main difficulty which arises in searching for the sources of Urwah is the lack of original work existing in a separate form. The available material is only in the form of quotations. It was left to the later scholars to quote from the work certain lines or passages as they required. As Urwah had personal contact with most of the Companions his authority must have been a single name or the very person who was present at the incident, hence the *Isnād* consisted of a single name. And it is easy to omit or overlook a single man's name in quoting. In certain cases they might have quoted from the middle of a very lengthy passage, overlooking *Isnād*. The other versions of Urwah's work, especially the one transmitted by al-Zuhrī, have *Isnād*. Urwah even uses composite *Isnād*<sup>9</sup> in the writing, as well as the single one.

Horovitz, who has studied the problem of *Isnād*, has answered the arguments of Caetani and other scholars thoroughly in his article "Alter und Ursprung des *Isnād*".<sup>10</sup> He points out that those who

denied the use of *Isnād* by Urwah did not notice all his *Isnād*. Furthermore he argues that there is a difference between what one writes when one is asked questions and what one does within learned circles. His conclusion is that the first entry of the *Isnād* into the literature of tradition was in the last third of the first century.

A Scottish scholar, J. Robson, who has studied the subject at some length, says:

It is during the middle years of the first century of Islam that one would first expect anything like an *Isnād*. By then many of the Companions were dead, and people who had not seen the Prophet would be telling stories about him. It might therefore naturally occur to some to ask these men for their authority. The growth of a hard and fast system must have been very gradual.<sup>11</sup>

He concludes:

We know that Ibn Ishāq, in first half of the second century, could give much of his information without an *Isnād*, and much of the remainder without a perfect one. His predecessors would almost certainly be even less particular than he in documenting their information. But we are not justified in assuming that the *Isnād* is a development of Zuhri's period and was unknown to Urwah. While the developed system had a slow growth, some element of *Isnād* would be present from as early a period as people could demand it.<sup>12</sup>

### **Professor Schacht and *Isnād***

Schacht has dealt with the legal traditions and their development. In his opinions *Isnād* are the most arbitrary part of traditions. They were developed within certain groups who traced back their doctrines to early authorities.<sup>13</sup> Commenting on Schacht's criticism, Professor Robson says:

The criticism levelled at the *Isnād* is very thoroughgoing, and some strong arguments are brought forward to suggest that the use of *Isnād* is a late development; but one hesitates to accept it to the full extent... Schacht is dealing primarily with legal traditions, a sphere where his



argument may apply more closely than elsewhere, as changing conditions and the development of legal thought must have demanded new regulations; but one wonders whether the argument is not too sweeping.<sup>14</sup>

We have just seen the statement of Ibn Sīrīn about *Isnād*. Schacht thinks that this statement was falsely attributed to Ibn Sīrīn. He says:

It is stated on the authority of the Successor Ibn Sīrīn that the demand for and the interest in *Isnāds* started from the civil war (*Fitnah*), when people could no longer be presumed to be reliable without scrutiny; we shall see later that the civil war which began with the killing of the Umayyad Caliph Walīd b. Yazīd (126 A.H.), towards the end of the Umayyad dynasty, was a conventional date for the end of the good old time during which the Sunnah of the Prophet was still prevailing; as the usual date for the death of Ibn Sīrīn is 110 A.H., we must conclude that the attribution of this statement to him is spurious. In any case, there is no reason to suppose that the regular practice of using *Isnāds* is older than the beginning of the second century A.H.<sup>15</sup>

But his whole argument is based on his arbitrary interpretation of the word *fitnah*. The assassination date of Walīd b. Yazīd has never been a conventional date in Islamic history and was never reckoned as the end of the "good old time". This title is given only to the period of four Righteous Caliphs. Furthermore, there were many *Fitnahs* before this date. There was the civil war between Ibn al-Zubayr and 'Abd al-Mālik b. Marwān about 70 A.H. But the biggest of all was the civil war between 'Alī and Mu'āwiyah, which produced a breach among Muslims which exists to the present day. Tāhā Husayn has described it rightly as the most fierce quarrel known in Islamic History.<sup>16</sup>

So, on what grounds does the word *fitnah* need to be interpreted in the sense of the civil war after the killing of Walīd b. Yazīd? To take the word arbitrarily in this sense is equal to interpreting it as the *Fitnah* of Tatar and Halaku. Schacht takes this word in the sense which suits him, without any historical justification, to prove his own theory, which is absurd.

Prof. Robson inclines to take the word in the sense of the *Fitnah* of Ibn al-Zubayr, considering the birth date of Ibn Sirīn, as well as the occurrence of the word *fitnah*, in the text of *al-Muwatta'* of Mālik which refers to this period.<sup>17</sup> The present research indicates that it should be taken back to the first and the most dangerous civil war in the history of Islam. For this suggestion, there are the following reasons:

1. Professor Robson has pointed out that at the middle of the first century, when many of the Companions were dead and people who had not seen the Prophet would be telling the story of the Prophet, someone naturally had asked them to name the authority. If we accept the status of the Prophet as it is shown in Robson's statement — which is quite unfair — this is possibly what might have occurred.

Yet before reaching this stage, there was a great upheaval in the fourth decade. Most likely the first fabrication of Ḥadīth began in the political sphere, crediting and discrediting the parties concerned. In the well-known work of al-Shawkānī, concerning spurious and similar traditions we find:

- 42 spurious Ḥadīth about the Prophet
- 38 spurious Ḥadīth about the first three Caliphs
- 96 spurious Ḥadīth about 'Alī and his wife Fātimah
- 14 spurious Ḥadīth about Mu'āwiyah<sup>18</sup>

This large number of spurious Ḥadīth about 'Alī and Fātimah shows that the large number of Ḥadīth was fabricated for political purpose. We have other evidence which shows that the spurious traditions began to originate at and about the period of the war between 'Alī and Mu'āwiyah, and continued later on as a counter-attack on the Umayyad Dynasty. *Muhaddithūn* and other scholars found it necessary from that time onwards to be more cautious in selecting their authorities.

2. The second reason for this assumption is the statement of Ibn Sirīn itself. There is no reason whatsoever to discredit it and challenge its authenticity. Ibn Sirīn's wording suggests that he relates a practice earlier than his own period. He uses the words "They did

not ask," "they said 'Name to us your men'" "were accepted", etc. He does not use the first person of the personal pronoun in a period when its usage was common. So it seems that he points to a practice in very early days. Furthermore, he says "they did not ask", which implies that the practice of *Isnād* was in existence, but people did not usually inquire, and it was left to the transmitter whether or not to disclose his sources.

3. The third reason is that the chart of the flourishing of *Isnād*, proves beyond doubt that if the system of *Isnād* had not been in use from the very beginning, it would have been impossible to fabricate the system of *Isnād* in those days of poor communication, and to produce all the minute details. Thus to claim that all these were fabricated is a revolt against reason.

Prof. Schacht has tried to prove his theory of 'back projection' of *Isnād* and its artificial creation in the second and third century, by providing some examples from the early work of Hadīth-*Fiqh* literature, such as the *Muwatta'* of Mālik and of al-Shaybānī and *al-Umm* of al-Shāfi'ī, and *al-Khirāj* of Abū Yūsuf. He brings a few Hadīth from these books with imperfect *Isnād* and traces them later in the classical books with full *Isnād*, consequently he shows the improvement in *Isnād*. The theory might seem very convincing to a layman.

But actually it involves a kind of forgery. Because, as it has been known to Schacht himself, these authors have described their method, saying that, had they not been afraid of the volume of the book they would have given all the Hadīth with full *Isnād*.

Al-Shāfi'ī says:

I lost some of my books but have verified what I remembered from what is known to scholars; I have aimed at conciseness, so as not to make my work too long, and have given only what will be sufficient, without exhausting all that can be known of the subject.

The same kind of statement has been made by Abū Yūsuf. But there is another more fundamental fact which goes against Schacht's theory, that is the very nature of the books he referred to.

It seems quite clear that he has not paid any attention to the

nature of a legal work. A lawyer, a judge or a *muftī*, whenever he gave his verdict, was not bound to give the full documents to support his verdict. When a scholar writes to another scholar, he may make only slight allusions to his references, so his colleague can recall the necessary items to his mind.

These were the methods used by the prominent lawyers of the early centuries of Islam. Though most of the writings of that period are not available in separate form, yet still we have a few legal books which belong to the second century A.H. A glance at their methods of quoting traditions would reveal this very fact. Al-Shāfi'ī has utilized the material from *al-Muwatta'* of Mālik, and Abū Yūsuf has utilized the work of Ibn Ishāq and others.

### **The above evidence and its implications**

In the writings of early scholars, mostly in non-Hadīth literature, the following features are very common:

1. The cutting of *Isnāds* and retaining the least possible quotations to serve the purpose, as the complete *Isnād* and ample references would make the work bulky.
2. The omission of the complete *Isnād* and quotation direct from the highest authority.
3. The use of *Isnād* by Abū Yūsuf reveals that he uses the complete *Isnād*, cuts it off, puts the anonymous word *rajl*, while he himself has mentioned a few pages earlier the exact name.
4. To use the word *al-Sunnah* and other words derived from it to mention the practice of the Prophet, without giving the text or *Isnād*, as the Hadīth in question was well-known to the scholars.

Let us summarise what has been said until now about *Isnād*. For the passing of information about the Prophet, *Isnād* was used. The first fact is that the system of *Isnād* began from the time of the Prophet and within the quarter century from the death of the Prophet, I mean from the beginning of the *Fitnah*, scholars became more cautious in the matter of *Isnād*.

The system as a whole is genuine, while any single *Isnād's* authority can be challenged if there is sufficient ground for it.

A fabricated *Isnād* was almost impossible to pass off as genuine without being detected. The Hadith-*Fiqh* and *Sīrah* literatures are not proper material for *Isnād* study. The researches of the orientalist are based on the investigation of the wrong materials, consequently producing wrong result.

*Isnād* has been utilized until now for the criticism of Hadīth. But beside this fundamental task, now we may utilize this system for the reconstruction of early works which have lost their identity as independent works. To understand the procedure for this sort of research, we have to grasp meanings of the terms employed by *Muhaddithin* in transmitting the records.

*Isnād* usually goes like this:

قال عبد الله ، حدثني أبي ، حدثنا روح ، أخبرنا سعيد  
بن أبي عروبة قتادة

The words like *haddathanā*, *akhbaranā* etc., are vehicles for transporting the documents. It was understood by some scholars that these terms mean only oral recitation. Mingana says that in his opinion the terms *rawā* and *haddatha* mean only oral transmission. He further says that to the best of his knowledge neither expression has ever referred to a written document lying before the narrator.

To refute this false assumption, I cite only two or three examples. Imam Ahmad b. Hanbal says:

حدثنا يحيى بن آدم ، قال حدثنا عبد الله بن ادريس  
أما على من كتابه عن عاصم بن قليب

Yahyā b. Ādam informs us that 'Abdullāh b. Idrīs transmitted the Hadīth through dictation from his book.

Here the book is employed for the teaching of the *Ḥadīth*, by way of dictation yet the same word *haddathanā* is used.

قال عبد الله، حدثني أبي، ثنا روح من كتابه، ثنا  
سعيد بن أبي عروبة

Ibn Hanbal says that Rāūḥ transmitted *Ḥadīth* to us from his book.

اخبرنا محمد بن المثنى قال حدثنا ابن أبي عدي هذا  
من كتابه . . . وحدثنا ابن أبي عدي من حفظه

Here Nasai gives an example of a *Ḥadīth* which was read to students twice by the teacher, once from memory and once from the book.

There are hundreds of clear examples for this but I confine myself to only three examples.

Now it has been clarified that the *Muhaddithūn* used these terms even in the existence of the written documents.

If we find a scholar through whom *Ḥadīths* have been transmitted by different students, we may trace the existence of written records very easily. To be on the safe side, we have to compare the materials transmitted by his different students. In the case of agreement in contents and form we can bring out the early text. But if there is no agreement in form, and they tally in meaning only, here it means that either oral transmission has been applied, or some of the narrators or all of them have expressed the meaning in their own words. This can be clarified by an example. Al-Zuhri compiled the biography of the Prophet. His material has been utilized by his students, such as Ibn Ishāq, Ma'mar, Yūnus, etc. Ibn Ishāq's work has been printed several times. Going through their works it becomes clear that Ma'mar, Yūnus and Muḥammad b. 'Abdullāh are three scholars whose versions go together with very little variations which are usually found in the different manuscript of any work,

while the version of Ibn Ishāq is in marked difference in its form and even in some of its contents. Here we may say that either Ibn Ishāq has expressed the meaning in his own words, or al-Zuhrī himself revised his work, but what we can say with certainty is that these three versions or the version of these three students presents the work of al-Zuhrī in its original written form. I have carried out some research on the *Sīrah* of al-Zuhrī, and a specimen page testifying to the result is available. Unfortunately I was not able to print it.

One of the outstanding historians of Islamic literature, Fuād Sezgin, has over-stressed written documents. Even the journeys of the scholars for collecting the Hadīth have been described by him as false tales. In the light of the written documents we cannot discard the journeys of *Muhaddithūn* to collect the materials. His argument is that there were eight kinds of learning certificate, almost all of which involved written documents except two, in which sometimes written and sometimes oral transmission was carried out. Thus the whole system of learning Hadīth rested on written documents. But the problem is that not all of those methods were in operation equally. No doubt there have been eight different ways to accumulate the knowledge, but the most important ones were to read to the teacher or to listen to him while the teacher was reading, and these were the most common features.

Furthermore, even in the case of written documents a scholar has no right to utilize the contents without the permission of the teacher, otherwise he would be counted unreliable and would be blamed of stealing Hadīth (*sāriq al-hadīth*). Therefore, even in the case of written documents one had to obtain the permission of the *Shaykh*, to avoid the title of *sāriq al-hadīth*, and thus losing credibility. In early days even to obtain permission to transmit a written record, without reading, was not encouraged. They used to say that one should not learn from *al-Suhufī*, meaning one who has collected the knowledge through the books without reading it to *Shuyūkh* though he had permission to transmit them, as it was bound to produce many mistakes. Meanwhile it is a fact that many *Muhaddithūn*, having books, transmitted orally, as it gave them a kind of prestige.

NOTES

1. Nāṣir al-Asad, *Musādir al-Sh'ar al-Jāhili*, 2nd. ed., (Cairo 1962), pp.255-267.
2. *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (Cairo 1374 A.H.), ed. M.F. 'Abdul Bāqī, intro. pp.14-16.
3. *Ibid.*, intro. p.15.
4. 'Abd al-Rahmān Suyūṭī, *Tadrib al-Rāwī* (Cairo 1379 A.H.), ed. A.R. Latīf, pp.220-21.
5. J. Robson, *Oriental Society Transaction* (Glasgow Univ. 1955), ch. "The Isnād in Muslim Traditions", vol.xv, p.18, quoting *Annali dell' Islam*.
6. *Ibid.*, p.19.
7. Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, vol.iv, pp.323-6, 328-331.
8. *Ibid.*, vol.vi, p.212.
9. *Ibid.*, vol.iv, pp.323-6, 328-331.
10. *Der Islam* (1918), vol.viii, pp.39-47.
11. Robson, *op. cit.*, p.21.
12. *Ibid.*
13. This is a well summarised theory of Schacht by Robson, p.20.
14. *Ibid.*, p.20.
15. Joseph Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (London 1950), pp.36-37.
16. Tāhā Husayn, *Uthmān* (Cairo 1951), p.5; See also Nicholson, *Literary History of the Arabs*, p.193.
17. Robson, *op.cit.*, vol.xv, p.22.
18. Al-Shawkānī, *al-Fawā'id al-Majmū'ah fī Bayān al-Aḥādīth al-Mawḍū'ah*, pp.320-408.



# THE SCIENCES AND CRITIQUE OF HADĪTH (‘ULŪM AL-HADĪTH)

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MUHAMMAD ZUBAYR SIDDĪQĪ

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We have seen that every Hadīth consists of two parts: the *Isnād* (the chain of transmitters) and the *Matn* (text). Each of these two parts is of equal importance to a traditionist. The latter as a report of the sayings or doings of the Prophet, forms a basis of the-Islamic rituals and laws; and the former constitutes the credentials of the latter. The traditionists, therefore, treat and consider the traditions with one and the same *Isnād* and different texts, as well as the traditions with one and the same text and different *Isnāds*, as entirely independent traditions. A critical study of traditions, therefore, likewise consists (according to the traditionists) of two parts: that of the *Isnād*, and that of the text.

In order to check the *Isnād* it is necessary to know the life and the career as well as the character of the various persons who constitute the various links in the chains of the different *Isnāds*. And in order to understand the exact significance of the text, and to test its genuineness, it is necessary to know the meaning of the various expressions used (some of which are rare and out of common use),

and also to learn its relation to the text of the other traditions (some of which may be either corroborated or contradicted by it).

In connection with Ḥadīth literature, therefore, there have been developed by the Muslims various other branches of literature which are summarized in the various works on the '*Ulūm al-Ḥadīth* — like those of Abū Muḥammad al-Rāmhurmuzī (d. 360 A.H./970 A.D.), Abū Nu'aym al-Isfahānī (d. 430 A.H./1038 A.D.), al-Khaṭīb al-Baghādī (d. 403 A.H./1012 A.D.), al-Hākim (321-405 A.H./933-1014 A.D.), Ibn al-Ṣalāh (d. 643 A.H./1245 A.D.) and many others. These are 100 in number, and each of them is said to be important enough to be treated as an independent branch of knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

Some of them are connected only with the *Isnād* of the traditions and its criticism; some relate to their text; and some relate to both the *Isnād* as well as the text. We will deal here with only two of them, and discuss their evolution and influence on Ḥadīth literature.

### ***Asmā' al-Rijāl* (Biography and criticism of the narrators of Ḥadīth)**

One of the most important and richest branches of literature, which originated and developed in connection with the *Isnād* in Ḥadīth, is that relating to the biography of the narrators of traditions. It is commonly known as *Asmā' al-Rijāl*. In it are included all the various works which deal with (i) the chronology; (ii) the biography; and (iii) the criticism of the narrators of traditions or of any class of the narrators, or with any such aspect of their life as may be helpful in determining their identity, veracity and reliability.

(i) *Chronology*. The consideration of chronology commenced and developed among the Muslims at an early period in the history of Islam. There is a difference of opinion as to the exact time when it was first used by the Muslims. According to some authorities, dates were introduced into official correspondence by the Prophet himself in the fifth year of the Hijrah, when a treaty was concluded between him and the people of Najrān.<sup>2</sup> But it is generally held that this was

done by 'Umar b. al-Khattāb — with the unanimous advice of a congregation of important Muslims — in the sixteenth or the seventeenth year of the Hijrah.<sup>3</sup> The same farsighted Caliph followed a chronological principle in the award of pensions to the various groups of Muslims of his time according to their priority in the acceptance of Islam, which (principle) was already accepted by the Community as a point of great distinction. Its use assumed greater importance on account of the necessity of an explanation of the historical verses in the Qur'an, and of the determination of the dates of revelation of the legal verses in order that it might be decided which of them had been cancelled and which of them were still in force.

They followed in their chronology the lunar calendar, which had been adopted by the Arabs long before the advent of Islam. But originally, at least the Makkans among the Arabs followed the solar calendar, which is evident from their division of the year according to the seasons, and also from the significance of the names of the various months, and is proved conclusively by J. Wellhausen in his scholarly book, *Reste arabischen Heidentums*.<sup>4</sup>

(ii) *Biography*. The composition of the biographical works with a perfect chronological order of the events, however, was commenced by the Muslims before the end of the first century of the Hijrah.

Horovitz has shown that Ābān (d. between 86 and 105 A.H.), the son of the Caliph 'Uthmān; 'Urwah b. al-Zubayr (26-94 A.H./646-712 A.D.); and Shurayh (who is said to have been born in 20 A.H. and lived more than 100 years) had collected a good deal of material relating to the biography of the Prophet. Soon after them, Wahb wrote a book on the *Maghāzi* — a fragment of which is preserved at Heidelberg in Germany.<sup>5</sup> Wahb was followed by numerous biographers of the Prophet during the second and third centuries. The fragment and the text of such of these biographies as are still extant reveal a thorough use of the chronological system by their authors.

(iii) *Criticism of the Narrators*. A general critical estimate of the

reliability of the narrators, based on their life and character, in order to determine the veracity of their reports, appears to have been taken into consideration earlier than the period when the *Isnād* became long enough to admit the application of the chronological method. Ibn 'Adī (d. 365 A.H./975 A.D.), in the introduction to his book, *Kāmil*, has given a general survey of the development of the criticism of the narrators since its beginning till his own time. According to him, narrators had been criticised by 'Abdullāh b. 'Abbās, 'Ubādah b. al-Sāmit and Anas, among the Companions; by al-Sha'bī, Ibn Sīrīn and Sa'īd b. al-Musaiyib, among the Followers. But it did not become common till the next generation, because most of the narrators till then had been reliable. In the next generation, when the narrators of doubtful reliability grew in number, their criticism also assumed greater importance. About the middle of the second century, therefore, A'mash, Shu'bah and Mālik criticised a large number of the narrators, and declared some of them as weak, and some as unreliable. About the same time flourished two of the greatest critics of *Rijāl* — Yahya b. Sa'īd al-Qattān (d. 198 A.H./813 A.D.) and 'Abd al-Rahmān b. Mahdī (d. 198 A.H./813 A.D.) whose verdict on the narrators' reliability or unreliability was accepted as final. Where they differed in their opinion about the reliability of a narrator, the traditionists used their own discretion in the matter. They were followed by another class of critics which included Yazīd b. Hārūn and others.<sup>6</sup>

Chronology, biography and criticism, having developed among the Muslims at an early period in the history of Islam, were applied by them to the *Isnād* in traditions — in order to check their genuineness and determine the reliability of their narrators. Chronology was taken by the traditionists as an important expedient to determine the genuineness of the *Isnād*. "Whenever you have a doubt about the veracity of a narrator", remarks Ḥafṣ b. Ghiyāth (d. 160 A.H./776 A.D.), "test him by means of the years" (i.e., the dates of birth and death). Sufyān al-Thawrī is said to have declared: "When the narrators forged traditions, we used the *Tā'rikh* (chronology) against them".<sup>7</sup> Ḥassān b. Zayd observed: "We never used against the forgers any device more effective than the *Tā'rikh*."<sup>8</sup>

Chronology had been, therefore, used as early as the second century by the traditionists in order to test the truth of the statement of the narrators. Some examples of it are cited by Muslim in the introduction to his *Ṣaḥīḥ*; and a good many of them are found in the works on *Asmā' al-Rijāl*.

The traditionists, however, having realized the importance of chronology, biography and criticism, compiled independent works dealing with the narrators of traditions in chronological order before the end of the second century. "Such registers of the narrators of traditions," says Otto Loth, "as had been chronologically arranged and in which every Muslim traditionist in general received a definite place, had been already in common use among the traditionists as indispensable hand-books in the second century."<sup>9</sup>

The beginning of the compilation of the works on *Asmā' al-Rijāl* is difficult to determine. But Ibn Nadīm has mentioned two books as *Kitāb al-Tā'rikh* in his *Fihrist*, in the discourse dealing with the works on the jurists and the traditionists. One of these books is by the great traditionist, 'Abdullāh b. al-Mubārak; and the other, by Layth b. Sa'd (d. 165-175 A.H./781-791 A.D.), an important traditionist of the Mālikī school.<sup>10</sup> These authors had little interest in history; and their works are not included in that section of the *Fihrist* in which historical works are dealt with. We may, therefore, count them among the earliest works on our subject. Horovitz is correct in his opinion that the earliest work on the subject was composed about the middle of the second century.<sup>11</sup> Among the products of the second century of Islam, however, must be included such works on our subject as the *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, *Kitāb Tā'rikh al-Fuqahā'*, *Kitāb Ṭabaqāt al-Fuqahā' wa'l-Muḥaddithīn*, *Kitāb Tasmīyat al-Fuqahā' wa'l-Muḥaddithīn*, *Kitāb Ṭabaqāt man rawa 'an al-Nabī* by al-Wāqidī and Haytham b. 'Adī — both of whom died in the beginning of the third century, and whose works served as important sources to the later writers on the subject — e.g. Ibn Sa'd (d. 230 A.H./844 A.D.), Ibn al-Khayyāt (d. 240 A.H./854 A.D.) and others.<sup>12</sup>

As all the early works on our subject have been lost, it is impossible to determine definitely their general plan and the nature of their contents. But from the later works which are based on them

and which we have received, and from the general tendencies of the traditionists of the time, it may be inferred that their contents mainly consisted of: (a) short descriptions of the genealogies and the dates of their birth and death, (b) some biographical matters relating to the narrators; and (c) a short criticism of their reliability together with the opinions of the important authorities about them. These are the main features of the contents of the *Tabaqāt* of Ibn Sa'd which will be described later; and these matters, as we have seen, had received serious attention of the traditionists before the end of the second century of the Hijrah.

The compilation of the biographies of the narrators of traditions, being begun in the second century of the Hijrah, was continued with zeal and vigour in the following centuries. In the third century, not only various specialists in the subject — e.g. Ibn Sa'd, Khalīfah b. al-Khayyāt, Ibn Abī Khaythamah (d. 279 A.H./892 A.D.) and others — but also almost every traditionist of reputation compiled simultaneously with his collection of traditions, some biographies of their narrators also. The compiler of each of the six standard works in Hadīth literature has to his credit one or more important books on the biography of the narrators of traditions.<sup>13</sup>

During the fourth and the succeeding centuries, the compilation of the biographies of traditionists appears to have become a fashion of the time throughout the vast Islamic dominions. Arabia, Syria, Mesopotamia, Persia, Egypt, Africa, Spain and India all produced numerous biographers of the traditionists, who compiled huge works on the subject.

The works on the *Asmā' al-Rijāl* helped the growth of general biographical literature in the Arabic language. There were compiled in Arabic the biographies of poets, grammarians, physicians, saints, jurists, judges, calligraphers, lovers, misers, idiots, and of other classes of people. The biographical literature in Arabic is, therefore, extremely rich. "The glory of the Muhammadan literature", says Dr. Sprenger, "is its literary biographies... There is no nation, nor has there been any, which like them, has during twelve centuries narrated the life of every man of letters".<sup>14</sup> Margoliouth remarks: "The biographical literature of the Arabs was exceedingly rich;

indeed it would appear that in Baghdad when an eminent man died, there was a market for biographies of him, as is the case in the capitals of Europe in our time... The literature which consists in collected biographies is abnormally large, and it is in consequence easier for the student of the history of the caliphate, to find out something about the persons mentioned in the chronicles, than in any analogous case".<sup>15</sup>

The magnitude of these biographical dictionaries may be ascertained from the large number of men whose biographies they contain. Ibn Sa'd's *Tabaqāt* contains the biographies of more than 4,000 traditionists. Al-Bukhārī's *Tā'rikh* deals with more than 42,000 traditionists. Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī in his *History of Baghdad*, gives short biographies of 7,831 persons. Ibn 'Asākir in the eighty volumes of his *History of Damascus*, collected together the biographies of a much larger number of people. Ibn Hajar in his *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb* and *Mizān al-'itidāl*, summarized the biographical notices on 12,415 and 14,343 narrators of traditions respectively. These figures which may be easily collected from numerous other works on our subject, are sufficient to show the magnitude of biographical literature in Arabic.

The works on the *Asmā' al-Rijāl*, however, differ from one another in their scope, their general plan, and the detailed nature of their contents, according to the main object of their compilers and authors. Some of them contain extremely short notices on a particular class of narrators of traditions. Such is the *Tabaqāt al-Huffāz* of Dhahabī,<sup>16</sup> and various other works on weak or unreliable narrators. Some of them deal with only their names, their *kunyas* and their titles or *nisbahs*. To this class belong the various works on *Asmā' wa'l-Kuna*, and the well-known *Kitāb al-Ansāb* of al-Sam'ānī. Some of them contain biographical details of all such narrators as lived in or visited any particular town — e.g. Aleppo, Baghdad, Damascus, etc. To this class belong the works of al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, Ibn al-'Asākir and others. Some of them deal with only the reliable or unreliable narrators — e.g., the *Kitāb al-Thiqāt* and the *Kitāb al-Du'afā'* of Ibn Hibbān and others. Some of them contain the biographies of only such narrators as find a place in any

particular collection of traditions or in a group of them. To this class belong a large number of works which deal with the lives of the narrators on whom al-Bukhārī or Muslim or the authors of all the six standard works on Hadīth have relied.

The works on the *Asmā' al-Rijāl* may, therefore, be classified into two main groups: (1) the general works, and (2) the special works.

### General works

By the general works on the *Asmā' al-Rijāl* are meant such of them as contain the biographies of all the narrators, or at least of all the important ones among them, who had been known to their compilers. To this class belong most of the early works on the subject. The *Tabaqāt* of Muḥammad b. Sa'd, the three Histories of al-Bukhārī, the History of Aḥmad b. Abī Khaythamah, and many other works on the *Asmā' al-Rijāl*, which were compiled during the third century of the Hijrah, and which contain the biographies of all the narrators, or at least of all the important ones among them, who had been known to their authors. The earliest of these works received by us is the *Kitāb al-Tabaqāt al-Kabīr* by Ibn Sa'd.

Ibn Sa'd, who possessed great learning and equally great love for it, also possessed a great love of books the possession and collection of which had already become a fashion among the Muslims. Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī says:<sup>17</sup> "He possessed vast learning, knew a large number of traditions, had great thirst for them, narrated a good many of them, and had collected a large number of books, particularly the rare ones, and those on Hadīth and *Fiqh*". "Of the collections of the works of al-Waqīdī", adds al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, "which were in the possession of four persons during the time of Ibn Sa'd, his was the largest".

Ibn Sa'd made the best use of his vast learning and rich library in compiling his own works. Two of them — the *Tabaqāt* and the *Kitāb Akhbār al-Nabī* — have been mentioned by Ibn Nadīm,<sup>18</sup> and a third, a smaller edition of the *Tabaqāt*, is mentioned by al-Nawawī<sup>19</sup> and others, but is not known to exist.



As Prof. Sachau says, Ibn Sa'd has shown in his work impartiality and honesty, thoroughness and minuteness, and objectivity and originality.<sup>20</sup> His impartiality and honesty have been generally acknowledged. Just as in spite of being a Mawlā' of the Hāshimites, he took no part in their party politics, so in his articles on the various persons he gave no expression to his personal relation to or prejudice for or against any one, and recorded in simple, unvarnished style all that he knew and considered of importance about them. His thoroughness and minuteness is abundantly shown by his constant reference to the various versions of an event as well as to the differences among his authorities. His objectivity is illustrated by the want of the least irrelevant material in his work. His originality is shown by his sub-classification of the narrators according to the various provinces in which they lived, and the general statement of the *Isnāds* of the various versions of an event before describing them and the entire absence of them in certain parts, all of which are ascribed to his own ingenuity. He has been compared by Sachau with Plutarch — the difference in their works being due to the fact that Plutarch formed the last link in a long chain of biographers whose contributions to the art he had inherited, whereas Ibn Sa'd had been one of the pioneers in the field.

Be it as it may, the *Tabaqāt* of Ibn Sa'd is one of the earliest extant works on *Asmā' al-Rijāl*, containing biographical notices of most of the important narrators of the most important period in the history of traditions. It is a rich mine of many-sided, valuable information about the early history of Islam. It may be described not only as the most important extant work on the subject, but also as one of the most important works in Arabic literature in general. Since the beginning of the fourth century A.H., it has been used as a source by a large number of authors on Arabian history and biography. Al-Balādhurī,<sup>21</sup> al-Tabarī, al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, Ibn al-Athīr, al-Nawawī and Ibn Hajar used it as an important source for their works, and al-Suyūṭī prepared an epitome of it. As a general biographical dictionary of the narrators it appears to have always occupied a unique position in the *Asmā' al-Rijāl*. The other works of the *Tabaqāt* class dealt only with particular classes of the narrators.

**Kitāb al-Tā'rikh of al-Bukhārī**

Ibn Sa'd's *Tabaqāt* was soon followed by the works of al-Bukhārī who claimed to have possessed some biographical knowledge about every narrator of traditions. He compiled three books on the history of the narrators in general. The largest of these is said to have contained the biographical notices of more than 40,000 narrators. But no complete manuscript of the book is known to exist. Only various parts of it are preserved in certain libraries on the basis of which the Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif, Hyderabad (India) has prepared a text of the book, and published it.

**Biographical dictionaries of particular classes of narrators**

Almost simultaneously with the biographical dictionaries of the narrators in general, was begun the compilation of those of particular classes of them. The most important of them are:

- i. those containing the biographies of the Companions;
- ii. those containing the biographies of the narrators who lived in or visited any particular town or province; and
- iii. those containing the biographies of the narrators belonging to the various schools of the jurists.

The biographical dictionaries of the companions constitute the vital part of the *Asmā' al-Rijāl*. But no independent book on the subject appears to have been written before the third century of the Hijrah, when the great traditionist, al-Bukhārī, compiled the first independent biographical dictionary of the Companions<sup>22</sup> which must have been mainly based on:

- (a) the *Sīrat* literature;
- (b) the numerous monographs relating to the various important events during the early period of the history of Islam;
- (c) a large number of traditions containing biographical material relating to the Companions; and
- (d) and the earlier general works on the *Asmā' al-Rijāl*.

Al-Bukhārī was followed by numerous authors during the different periods in the history of Islam, who produced a vast literature on the subject. Abū Ya'la Ahmad b. 'Alī (201-307 A.H./816-919 A.D.), Abū al-Qāsim 'Abdullāh al-Baghawī (213-317 A.H./828-929 A.D.), the great traditionist and copyist. Abū Hafs 'Umar b. Ahmad (commonly known as Ibn Shāhīn (297-385 A.H./909-995 A.D.), one of the most prolific writers of his time (who spent more than 700 *dirhams* on ink only), Abū 'Abdullāh Muḥammad b. Yahya b. Manda (d. 301 A.H./913 A.D.), Abū Nu'aym Ahmad b. 'Abdullāh (336-403 A.H./947-1012 A.D.), who has been described as one of the best traditionists, Ibn 'Abd al-Barr (368-463 A.H./978-1070 A.D.) of Cordova, a contemporary of al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, and the greatest traditionist of his time in the West, Abū Mūsa Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr (501-581 A.H./1107-1185 A.D.), and many others produced an extensive literature on the biographies of the Companions.

The results of the researches of all these scholars were collected together in the seventh century A.H. by the well-known historian and traditionist, 'Izz al-Dīn b. al-Athīr (555-630 A.H./1160-1230 A.D.) in his book, *Usd al-Ghābah*, which was based mainly on the works of Ibn Manda, Abū Nu'aym, Abū Mūsa and Ibn 'Abd al-Barr (whose *Istī'āb* contained the biographies of only 300 Companions, and to which a supplement was written by Ibn Fathūn, which contained the biographical notices of about the same number of Companions). Ibn al-Athīr, however, does not follow his sources blindly.

The *Usd al-Ghābah* was followed in the ninth century of the Hijrah by a more comprehensive work on the subject — viz. the *Isābah fī Tamyīz al-Ṣaḥābah*. Its author, Shihāb al-Dīn Abū al-Faḍl b. 'Alī b. Hajar al-'Asqalānī (773-852 A.H./1371-1448 A.D.) was the greatest literary figure of his time.

He left about 150 of his incomplete and complete compositions and compilations which show his versatile genius. The *Fath al-Bārī*, a commentary on *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, is described as a work by which was paid the great debt which the literary world of Islam owed to the work of al-Bukhārī for six centuries.

In the *Isābah*, Ibn Hajar has put together the results of the

labours of all his predecessors in the field of the biographies of the Companions, criticising them in certain cases, and adding to them the results of his own researches.

Another huge set of biographical dictionaries of narrators had been completed according to places or provinces where they lived or which they visited. The number of such dictionaries is large. Not only almost all the provinces, but almost every important town, had not only one or two but several biographers who collected together the biographies of every important traditionist or man of letters who either lived in it or visited it. Makkah, Madīnah, Baṣrah, Kūfah, Wāsit, Damascus, Antioch, Alexandria, Qayrawān, Cordova, Mausil, Aleppo, Baghdad, Isfahān, Bukhāra, Merv, etc. all had their historians and biographers of their men of letters.<sup>23</sup>

Many of these provincial historians dealt with the political history of these provinces. Many of them dealt mainly with the biographies of their men of letters in general and those of the narrators and the traditionists in particular. Many of the early biographical dictionaries, which contained the biographies of the important Muslim scholars of particular places (since their conquest by the Muslims till the time of the compilers), are supplemented by their successors with those of the eminent men of the later periods down to almost modern times.

One of the most important works of this type is al-Khatīb al-Baghdādī's *Tā'rikh Baghdād* which is the earliest biographical dictionary of the men of letters — principally, traditionists — who either belonged to, or delivered lectures in, the great metropolis.<sup>24</sup>

Al-Khatīb compiled 56 large and small books and treatises a list of which is given by Yāqūt in his *Mu'jam al-Udabā'*.<sup>25</sup> The most important of these works is his *Tā'rikh Baghdād*. In this monumental work (which he read out to his students in the year 461 A.H.), having given the topography of Baghdad, Rusāfah and al-Madā'in (Ptesiphon), which has been fully utilised by Le Strange in his learned book on Baghdad, al-Khatīb compiled together the biographies of 7,831 eminent men and women (chiefly, traditionists) who were either born in Baghdad, or who came to it from other places and delivered lectures (on traditions). He has also described

some important visitors to the city. He gives their names, *kunya*, dates of death, and certain other biographical matters, and the opinions of important traditionists about their reliability.

In the arrangement of the various articles, al-Khatīb gave the pride of place to the Companions. They are followed by those having the name Muḥammad. In the other articles alphabetical order has been followed. The articles on those who are known by their *kunya*, and on women, are put at the end.

In this book al-Khatīb has shown his vast knowledge of Ḥadīth and of the *Asmā' al-Rijāl*, and has also demonstrated his impartiality and critical acumen. He always gives the source of his information, and very often discusses (in his notes) the reliability of the traditions quoted, and of the reports received by him; he tries to determine the facts without prejudice or partiality.

Al-Khatīb had brought his dictionary down to 450 A.H. His successors continued the work after him. Al-Sam'ānī (506-562 A.H./1113-1167 A.D.), al-Dubaythī (558-637 A.H./1163-1239 A.D.), Ibn al-Najjār (578-643 A.H./1183-1245 A.D.) and others wrote supplements to his book compiling biographies of eminent men of Baghdad till their own times.<sup>26</sup>

### History of Damascus by Ibn al-'Asākir

The entire plan of the History of Baghdad was followed by Ibn al-'Asākir in his huge biographical dictionary of the eminent men of Damascus in 80 volumes which excited the wonder and admiration of the later writer.

He compiled a large number of important works; a long list of his works is given by Yāqūt in the *Mu'jam al-Uḍabā'*. Many of these are still preserved in the various libraries in the East and in the West.

The most important and most voluminous of his works is the History of Damascus. In this book, after giving a short history of Syria in general and of Damascus in particular, and after stating

briefly the superiority of Syria to other places on the basis of certain traditions extolling Syria in general and Damascus in particular, and after describing its prophets and monasteries, Ibn al-ʿAsākir collected together the biographies of the eminent men and women of various classes (chiefly traditionists) who either lived in or visited Damascus.

Like al-Khatīb al-Baghdādī and Ibn al-ʿAsākir, various other traditionists and historians collected together the biographies of men of letters in general, and of the narrators in particular, of various other towns. Ibn Manda and Abū Nuʿaym of Iṣfahān collected together the biographies of the narrators who belonged to their town,<sup>27</sup> and the work of the latter is preserved in the libraries of Rampur, Constantinople and Leiden. Al-Hākim compiled those of the narrators who belonged to Nishāpūr, which has been admired by al-Subkī.<sup>28</sup> Abū al-Qāsim ʿUmar b. Aḥmad al-ʿUqaylī, generally known as Ibn al-ʿAdīm (588-660 A.H./1191-1262 A.D.) collected together the biographies of eminent men, including a large number of traditionists, of Aleppo in about 30 volumes. It was supplemented by his different successors.<sup>29</sup> Abū Saʿd al-Samʿānī (506-562 A.H./1113-1167 A.D.) compiled a biographical dictionary mainly of the traditionists of Merv in 20 volumes.<sup>30</sup> The traditionists of Wāsit, of Kūfah, of Baṣrah, of Hirāt, and Qazwīn and of many other towns found their biographers in Ibn al-Dubaythī,<sup>31</sup> Ibn al-Najjār,<sup>32</sup> Ibn Shabbah<sup>33</sup> (173-263 A.H./789-876 A.D.), Ibn al-Bazzāz,<sup>34</sup> and in al-Rāfi<sup>35</sup> respectively.

Over and above the biographical dictionaries of the traditionists and narrators living in particular towns, there were also collected together the biographies of the narrators living in certain provinces — e.g. Andalusia, Africa, Ṣanʿā, Egypt, Khurāsān, etc. — by Ibn al-Fardī, Ibn Bashkwal, al-Humaydī and others.

### Criticism and techniques of Hadīth

Side by side with the Hadīth literature, there also developed the methods of criticism and the techniques of Hadīth. It is natural for a reasonable person who may receive the report of an event in which he may be interested, to inquire about the character and reliability of

the reporter as well as into the likelihood of the event which has been reported to him. In the Qur'an, at any rate, we find clear indication of the criticism of the reporters of an event as well as of the likelihood of it. It emphasised the principle of the criticism of the reporters of an event in the verse 6 of Sūrah *al-Hujrāt*:

*O you who believe! If an unrighteous person comes to you with a report, look carefully into it.*

The principle of the plausibility of a statement has also been indicated in the Qur'an in several places. The accusation against 'Ā'ishah has been described as an evident falsehood,<sup>36</sup> because her character was above all suspicion. The Qur'an has also rejected as unreasonable and unfounded, the theory of the sonship of Ezra and of Jesus, which was asserted by the Jews and the Christians.<sup>37</sup>

Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) also criticised many of the reporters, and made fun of superstitious beliefs of the Jews and of the pagan Arabs as unreasonable and foolish.

After the Prophet's death, when his Hadīths were sought after and were reported by many of his Companions, several Companions criticised some of the reporters and rejected some of their reports. 'Alī said about the report of a Hadīth by Mu'qil b. Sinān that he could not accept the report of an uncultured, solvenly Bedouin.<sup>38</sup> 'Umar b. al-Khattāb said in the presence of many Companions that he could not give up the Book of God and the practice of His Prophet because of the report of a woman (Fātimah bt. Qays), for no one could tell whether she was right or wrong, and whether she remembered (what she reported) or had forgotten.<sup>39</sup> 'Ammār b. Yāsir once reported a Hadīth of the Prophet with regard to *tayammum* in an assembly of the Companions in which 'Umar was also present. On hearing the Hadīth, 'Umar said to 'Ammār: "Fear God".<sup>40</sup> This shows that 'Umar did not accept what 'Ammār had reported. The *Sahīh* of Muslim contains a report in which Ibn 'Abbās criticised numerous 'judgments' of 'Alī b. Abī Tālib.<sup>41</sup> When Maḥmūd b. al-Rabī' reported in an assembly of the Companions that the Prophet had said that he who professed that there was no God

but Allah would not be put into hell-fire, Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī remarked that he did not think that the Prophet ever had said any such thing.<sup>42</sup> Many other instances of the criticism of the reporters of Hadīth by their fellow-Companions (e.g. 'Ā'ishah, 'Umar, Ibn 'Abbās and others) may be easily gathered from works on Hadīth and the *Asmā' al-Rijāl*. These criticisms of the Companions against one another show that they are not above criticism. As a matter of fact, according to the principles accepted by most of the Sunni Muslim scholars, no one except the Prophets is infallible. And even the Prophets are liable to commit mistakes in matters which do not concern the religions revealed to them.

The practice of criticising the Hadīths of the Prophet and their reporters (by the Companions) was followed by the traditionists of the later generations. Shu'bah b. al-Hajjāj, Yahyā b. Sa'īd al-Qattān, 'Alī b. al-Madīnī, Ahmad b. Hanbal and many other traditionists criticised the reporters of the Hadīth, pointed out their character, and fixed up the degree of their reliability. Thus there developed in Arabic two important branches of literature: (1) *ʿIlm Riwāyat al-Hadīth* which is also called *Mustalah al-Hadīth* (the science of narration or techniques of Hadīth); (2) *ʿIlm al-Jarh wa'l-Ta'dīl* (the science of criticism of the reporters).

### 1. *ʿIlm Riwāyat al-Hadīth*

The earliest treatise received by us containing matters connected with the *Riwāyat* or transmission of Hadīth is the *al-Risālah* of al-Shāfi'ī (767-820 A.D.), which deals mainly with the jurisprudence of the Shafi'ī system of Islamic law. It was followed by the works of Abū Muḥammad al-Ramḥurmuzī (d. cr. 350 A.H./961 A.D.), al-Hākim (d. 403 A.H./1012 A.D.), Abū Nu'aym (745 A.H./1038 A.D.) and of al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (1002-1071 A.D.) who systematized the matter described by his predecessors, in his *Kitāb al-Kifāyah*. He was followed by Qādī 'Iyād (d. 1139 A.D.) and Abū Ḥafs, each of whom wrote a treatise on the subject. After them, Ibn al-Ṣalāh (d. 643 A.H./1245 A.D.) compiled together the results of the works of all the previous writers on the subject, adding to them some of his own observations in his book known as *Kitāb 'Ulūm al-*



*Hadīth*. He was followed by numerous writers on the subject, like Ibn Kathīr (1302-1372 A.D.), al-'Irāqī and others.<sup>43</sup> The *Fath al-Mughīth*, which is al-Sakhāwī's commentary on the *Alfīyah* of al-'Irāqī, and the *Tadrib al-Rāwī*, which is a commentary on the *Taqrīb* of al-Nawawī, contain exhaustive treatment of *'Ilm Riwayat al-Hadīth*.

Al-Shāfi'ī and others have described the qualifications necessary for a transmitter of *Hadīth* as follows:

He (the transmitter) must be of firm faith, well known for his truthfulness in what he reported. He should understand its contents, should know well how the change in expression affects the ideas expressed therein. He should report *verbatim* what he learnt from his teachers, and not narrate in his own words the sense of what he had learnt. He must possess a retentive memory and should remember his book well, if he reported from it. He should be free from making a report on the authority of those whom he met, what he did not learn from them. His report must be in agreement with what has been reported by those who are recognized to have good memory, if they also have transmitted these reports.<sup>44</sup>

All the authorities on the subject (the traditionists as well as the jurists) are unanimously of the opinion that a transmitter of a tradition, in order to be acceptable, must be of firm faith, mature age and proved integrity, and have good memory. He must be well-versed in the method of learning, preserving and transmitting the traditions. He must be thoroughly conversant with the names, careers and characters of the earlier reporters of traditions, as well as with the various classes of them and their defects and special characteristics.

The writers on the subject have divided the traditions, into three classes, according to the degree of their reliability on account of the perfection or imperfection of the chain of their transmitters, the freedom of their texts from hidden defects, and their acceptance or rejection by the Companions, the Followers and their Successors.

These three classes are:

- (i) the *Sahīh*<sup>45</sup> or Genuine;
- (ii) the *Hasan* or the Fair; and
- (iii) the *Da'if* or the Weak.

The Weak traditions have been sub-divided according to the degree of defects in their reporters or in the texts of the reports themselves. These sub-divisions fall into several categories, e.g. the *mu'allaq* (the suspended), the *maqtū'* (interrupted), the *munqati'* (broken), the *mursal* (incomplete), the *musahhaf* (a tradition having a mistake in *Isnād* or in the text), the *shādh* (a tradition with a reliable *Isnād* but contrary to another similarly attested tradition), the *mawdū'* (the forged) etc. These and other techniques of Hadīth have been fully explained and discussed in the works on '*Ulūm al-Hadīth*'. But the authorities on the subject differ from one another in their interpretation of some of these technical terms. Some of these different interpretations have been explained by al-Sakhāwī and al-Suyūṭī in their works which have been already mentioned.

The writers on '*Ulūm al-Hadīth*' have also described the methods of learning, preserving, teaching and writing down the traditions in book form. They have also described the methods of collating the manuscripts with their original copies as well as other matters connected with the subject.

## 2. 'Ilm al-Jarh wa'l-Ta'dīl

This science forms a very important part of *Asmā' al-Rijāl* which has been already dealt with, in some detail. A short but complete description of its origin and development has been given by al-Jazā'irī.

The traditionists as well as the jurists, however, have also divided the traditions according to the number of their transmitters during the first three generations of the Muslims, into:

- (i) the *Mutawātir*;
- (ii) the *Mashhūr*; and
- (iii) the *Āhād*.

The *Mutawātir* are the traditions which have been transmitted

throughout the first three generations of the Muslims by such a large number of transmitters as cannot be reasonably expected to agree on a falsehood. There is a difference of opinion about the number of the transmitters necessary for it during each of the first three generations of the Muslims. Some authorities fix it at seven, some at forty, some at seventy, and some at a much higher number. Very few of the traditions received by us belong to the category of the *Mutawātir*. They have been collected together by al-Suyūṭī in his *al-Azhār al-Mutanāthirah fī al-Akhbār al-Mutawātirah*.

The *Mashhūr* are the traditions which being transmitted originally in the first generation by two, three or four transmitters, were later on transmitted on their authority, by a large number of transmitters in the next two generations. Such traditions are also called the *Mustafīd*. To this class belong a large number of traditions which are included in all the collections of Hadīths and constitute the main foundations of the Islamic law.

The *Āhād* are the traditions which were transmitted during the first three generations of the Muslims by one to four transmitters only.

The traditions have been also subdivided into two classes:

- (i) those that have been narrated by all their transmitters *verbatim*, the expressions used by all of them being identical, and
- (ii) those traditions the contents of which have been reported by their transmitters in their own words.

### The legal importance of traditions

The legal importance of all these three classes of traditions has been discussed in the works on Islamic Jurisprudence. The first two classes are recognized by all the important Sunni jurists as the second important source of Islamic law since the life-time of the Prophet. The last of them, i.e. the *Āhād*, has been accepted as superior to *Qiyās* (Analogy) by all the important Sunni schools of Islamic law except that of Imam Mālik, who gives superiority to *Qiyās* in face of the *Āhād* traditions.

As a matter of fact, the acceptance of Hadīth as a source of

Islamic law has been advocated in the Qur'an which says:

*Whatever the Apostle gives to you, take it; and whatever he forbids, abstain from it.*<sup>46</sup>

The Prophet also very often emphasised the importance of his Hadīth for his followers.<sup>47</sup> He as well as his immediate successors took the knowledge of Hadīth into consideration while appointing the state officials. According to al-Dārimī, whenever any legal case came to Abū Bakr, he looked into the Qur'an and decided the case according to it, if he found it there. But if he did not find it in the Qur'an, he referred to the practice of the Prophet and decided the case accordingly. If he failed to find it there also, he inquired from the other Companions about it; and if they informed him of any decision of the Prophet in the matter, he thanked God and decided the case accordingly. But if the Companions failed to cite any decision of the Prophet, Abū Bakr collected the leaders of the people, and sought their advice; and after they arrived at an agreed decision, he ordered according to it.<sup>48</sup>

The same was the practice of 'Umar also. Whenever any question of law came to him for decision and he failed to find any authority for it in the Qur'an, he inquired from his fellow Companions whether they knew any Hadīth on the subject. If they reported any relevant tradition and also produced sufficient evidence in their support, he accepted the tradition and gave his judgment according to it. He asked an assembly of the Companions (when the problem of the delivery of a dead child by a woman on account of being attacked by another woman arose) to relate to him any Hadīth on the subject, which they might know. Mughīrah related a Hadīth on the subject. 'Umar asked him to bring a witness to support him in his narration. Muhammad b. Maslamah supported Mughīrah. 'Umar then accepted the Hadīth and decided the case accordingly.<sup>49</sup> Many similar cases are mentioned in the Hadīth works e.g. the fixation of the number of *takbīr* in the *Jināzah* prayer, the imposition of the poll-tax on the Zoroastrians,<sup>50</sup> and the use of *tayammum* in the case of night-pollution.<sup>51</sup> In all these cases, Hadīths were sought out

and laws were laid down according to them.

There were also cases which were decided by the Companions according to their own opinion<sup>52</sup> (*Ra'y*) on account of the want of knowledge of any Hadīth on the subject. But they changed their decisions as soon as they came to know of it. There are reported cases in which the Companions like Abū al-Dardā' and Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī migrated away from a place because some of the people living there preferred their own personal opinions to the traditions which were related to them.<sup>53</sup>

Of course, there were cases in which 'Umar and some other Companions, on being told of a Hadīth on any subject, did not follow it and gave their judgment against its obvious sense and according to their own opinion. During the caliphate of 'Umar, there arose the important problem of the right to the fifth part of the booty for the relatives of the Prophet. The Prophet's practice was in its favour. It was discussed for several days in an assembly of the Companions, and after a long discussion 'Umar decided against the practice of the Prophet and what was considered to be the command of the Qur'an.<sup>54</sup> For he held that the verses of the Qur'an and the basic Islamic principle did not justify the continuance of the practice of the Prophet after his death. There are mentioned several other cases of this type in Hadīth works. But a close scrutiny of all these cases shows that the Hadīth of the Prophet was not rejected altogether. It was either differently interpreted, or the memory and the understanding of the reporters were questioned.

The Muslim doctors, however, have discussed the basic problem of the nature and character of the words and deeds of the Prophet. Many of them are of the opinion that every word and action of the Prophet is of religious character and must be literally followed by every Muslim. Others differentiate between what he said or did as a Prophet and what he said and did as an ordinary man. Some of the Muslim doctors are of the opinion that what he said or did as an ordinary man has no religious character and, therefore, need not be followed by all the Muslims. For the Prophet himself said: "I am a human being. When I command you to do any thing concerning your religion, then accept it; and when I recommend to you to do any

thing on account of my personal opinion, then you should know that I am also a human being".<sup>55</sup> This means that the latter recommendation may or may not be accepted. These personal actions and likes and dislikes of the Prophet also are of two classes: (i) those which are restricted to him only on account of his being in a privileged position as a prophet; (ii) and those which may be followed by other Muslims also.

All the orthodox Muslim jurists, however, are unanimously of the opinion that every tradition of the Prophet which is proved to be reliable according to the canons laid down by them and is of religious character, is of great legal importance, second only to that of the Qur'an. In this there is no difference of opinion between the traditionists and those who are known as *Ashāb al-Ra'y* (the people of opinion). All the important Muslim jurists belonging to the first three generations of the Muslims preferred the traditions to *Qiyās*. As a matter of fact, many of them refused to express their own opinion on legal matters in cases in which no tradition was known to them.<sup>56</sup> The practices followed by the Companions were also accepted as legal authority by the Muslims of the next two generations, because they reasonably presumed that they must have been based on the traditions and the practices of the Prophet which were followed by the Companions scrupulously after due consideration. This was the basis of the principle followed by Imam Mālik in accepting the practices of the Companions as an important legal authority.

But the important Muslim jurists differed among themselves about the legal significance of those traditions about the reliability of which they were not certain. To this class of traditions belong the *Āhād* category of them. Imam Abū Hanīfah and Imam Mālik did not consider all the traditions belonging to this category as superior to *Qiyās*. Imam Mālik preferred *Qiyās* to all *Āhād* traditions which were not backed by the practices of the Companions and the Followers. Imam Abū Hanīfah accepted some of them and rejected others, as was the practice of 'Umar b. al-Khattāb.<sup>57</sup> He accepted them in connection with ordinary matters, if he was satisfied about the legal acumen and instinct of the reporter. But in cases of intricate

legal problems, he rejected them unless they were supported by circumstantial evidence and basic Islamic principles.

But Imam al-Shāfi'ī preferred the *Āhād* traditions to *Qiyas* in all cases. He has tried to prove it in all his works by quoting a large number of cases in which the reports of single individuals were accepted by the Prophet himself and, after him, by many of the Companions also.

It may thus be seen that the difference of opinion between the various orthodox Sunni schools of Muslim law is not with regard to the acceptance of Hadīth in general (as an important source of Islamic law), but about a particular class of it. It has been already shown that the first three generations of the Muslims treated those Hadīths and *Sunan* of the Prophet, which, they considered to be reliable and of religious importance, to be the second important source of Islamic laws. It is, therefore, unwarranted to assert that the Hadīths were not considered as an important source of Islamic law during the classical period (as a modern European orientalist has tried to prove.<sup>58</sup>

### The principles of criticism of Hadīth

The traditionists and the jurists have developed some sound principles for the criticism of Hadīth. These principles are described in the works on *Usūl al-Hadīth* and Jurisprudence, and some of them may also be gathered from the works on the *Mawdū'āt* and the *Asmā' al-Rijāl*.

As every Hadīth consists of two parts — (i) the *Isnād* (the chain of narrators) and (ii) the *Matn* (the text) — the principles of the criticism of Hadīth may also be classified into two categories: (i) those relating to the *Isnād*, and (ii) those relating to the text.

(i) The criticism of the *Isnād*, its origin and earliest application to Hadīth, and its development, and the origin and development of biographical literature in connection with it, and other connected matters (including the necessary qualifications of the narrators) have been already discussed in detail. The principles of its criticism,

which are based on them, may be summarized as follows:

- (a) Every Hadīth must be traced back to its original reporter through a continuous chain of transmitters, whose identity, unquestionable character and high qualities of head and heart must have been established.
- (b) Every Hadīth reporting an event which took place every now and then in the presence of a large number of people, must have been originally reported by several narrators.

It is on account of these principles that a large number of traditions, which do not follow them, have been rejected by all the important traditionists, and are included in the works on the *Mawdū'āt*. An example of this class is the Hadīth reported by Abū Hurayrah alone that the Prophet used to recite *Bismillāh* loudly in all his prayers. Another example is the Hadīth (said to have been reported by Abū Bakr alone) which says that at the time of the Call for the prayers, the Muslims kissed their thumbs when the Prophet's name was recited. Each of these traditions is rejected by the traditionists because it is reported by a single Companion, whereas the events reported took place several times everyday in the presence of a large number of Muslims.

(ii) The genuineness of the *Isnāds*, however, is no proof of the actual genuineness of the text of the traditions to which they are attached.<sup>59</sup> According to the traditionists, even if the *Isnād* is faultless, the text may be a forgery. Ibn al-Jawzī has appreciated and quoted the remark:

If you find a Hadīth contrary to reason, or to what has been established to be correctly reported, or against the accepted principles, then you should know that it is forged.<sup>60</sup>

Abū Bakr b. al-Taiyib is reported to have remarked that it is a proof of the forged character of a tradition that it be against reason and common experience; or that it be contrary to the explicit text of the Qur'an or the *Mutawātir* traditions or the Consensus (*Ijmā'*); or that it contains the report of an important event taking place in the



presence of a large number of people, whereas it be reported by a single individual; or that it lays down severe punishment for minor faults, or promises high rewards for insignificant good deeds.<sup>61</sup> Al-Hākīm has given several examples of forged and weak traditions having sound *Isnāds*.<sup>62</sup> Al-Suyūṭī has remarked that very often, there are found weak or forged traditions with sound *Isnāds*; and he has given several examples of them.<sup>63</sup> As a matter of fact, the only sure guidance to the determination of the genuineness of a tradition is (as remarked by Ibn al-Mahdī and Abū Zar'ah) a faculty that is developed by a traditionist through long, continuous study of the traditions, and as a result of constant discussions about them with other traditionists.<sup>64</sup>

On the basis of the above-mentioned and other similar remarks by important traditionists, the following general principles for the criticism of the texts of the traditions may be laid down:

- (a) A tradition must not be contrary to the other traditions which have been already accepted by the authorities on the subject as authentic and reliable. Nor should it be contrary to the text of the Qur'an or the accepted basic principles of Islam;
- (b) a tradition should not be against the dictates of reason and natural laws and common experience;
- (c) the traditions containing disproportionately high rewards for insignificant good deeds or disproportionately severe punishments for ordinary sins must be rejected;
- (d) the traditions containing the excellent virtues of the various chapters of the Qur'an should not be generally accepted as reliable;
- (e) the traditions containing the excellence and praises of persons, tribes and particular places should be generally rejected;
- (f) the traditions which contain detailed prophecies of the future events with dates must be rejected;
- (g) and the traditions containing such remarks of the Prophet as may not be in keeping with his prophetic position, or such expressions as may not be suitable to him, should be rejected.

It is on account of these principles that a large number of traditions which are included in such collections of them as are commonly thought to be reliable, have been rejected by the compilers of the standard Hadīth-collections; and they are included in the collections of forged traditions (like those of Ibn al-Jawzī,<sup>65</sup> Mullāh 'Alī al-Qārī,<sup>66</sup> al-Shawkānī<sup>67</sup> and others).

Among them al-Shawkānī has collected together in his book the results of the researches of the previous writers on the subject. He has also given the names of the Hadīth works in which the forged traditions are to be found. Moreover, in many cases, he has fixed up the narrators who forged these traditions.

In the standard collections of the traditions also (in spite of the great care of their compilers), there are still found some weak or forged traditions, which have been discussed and criticised by their commentators and some other authorities on traditions. The following are some examples of them:

(a) The Hadīth, reported by al-Bukhārī, that Adam's height was sixty yards, has been criticised by Ibn Hajar on the basis of the measurement of the homesteads of some of the ancient nations which do not show that their inhabitants were of an enormous height.<sup>68</sup>

(b) The Hadīth reported by al-Bukhārī, that the verse of the Qur'an (49:9): *And if two parties of believers fall to fighting, then make peace between them*, refers to the quarrel between the party of 'Abdullāh b. Ubaiy and that of the Companions of the Prophet, has been criticised by Ibn Battāl, who has pointed out that the verse refers to a quarrel between two parties of the Muslims, whereas 'Abdullāh b. Ubaiy had not accepted Islam even outwardly at the time when the verse was revealed.<sup>69</sup>

(c) The Hadīth, that if Ibrāhīm (the son of the Prophet) had lived, he would have been a prophet, has been severely criticised by al-Nawawī, Ibn 'Abd al-Barr and Ibn al-Athīr; and al-Shawkānī has included it among the forged traditions.<sup>70</sup>

(d) The Hadīths reported by Ibn Mājah on the excellence of Qazwīn (his own hometown) have been declared by the traditionists as forged ones.

(e) The Ḥadīth reported by some traditionists, that "he who loved, kept clean and died, is a martyr" has been declared by Ibn al-Qaiyim as forged and baseless. He says that even if the *Isnād* of this Ḥadīth were as bright as the sun, it would not cease to be wrong and fictitious.<sup>71</sup>

(f) The Ḥadīth reported by al-Bukhārī that Abraham will pray to God on the Day of Judgment (saying: "O Lord Thou hast promised that Thou wouldst not humiliate me on the Day of Judgment") has been criticised and rejected by al-Ismā'īlī (cited by Ibn Hajar).<sup>72</sup>

(g) Most of the traditions concerning the coming of al-Dajjāl and of the Mahdī, and those concerning Khadir, are declared by the traditionists as forged ones, and are included in the works on the *Mawdū'āt*.

Many other similar instances of the criticism of the text of traditions included in their collections by even standard, authoritative compilers may be gathered from the commentaries on those compilations and the works on the *Asmā al-Rijāl* and the *Mawdū'āt*. It is thus clear that the Muslim doctors criticised not only the *Isnād* of each tradition but also its text, and did not fail to point out its defect, weakness and its unreliability or its forged character (determined in accordance with the principles which have been mentioned above).

At the end, I may add that there is enough material available for the compilation of a standard collection of completely authentic traditions out of the already generally accepted compilations of them, after examining each tradition contained in them, according to the principles already laid down by the Muslim traditionists, as well as according to those which may be prescribed by the modern literary critics. It is, of course, a tremendous task; but, certainly, it can be achieved with the combined efforts of such Muslim scholars and modern Orientalists as may be interested in the subject.

## NOTES

1. Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Tadrib al-Rāwī* (Egypt 1307 A.H.), p.9.
2. *Ibid.*, p.256.
3. *Ibid. loc. cit.*
4. Pp.94-101. Also see J.H. Kramers, H.A.R. Gibb (ed.), *Shorter Encyclopædia of Islam* (Leiden 1953), article "Tā'rikh", W. Hartner.
5. *Islamic Culture*, (Hyderabad) vol.i, pp.550, 558; Muḥammad Ibn Sa'd, *Kitāb al-Tabaqāt al-Kabīr* (Leiden 1904-18), ed. Edward Sachau, *et.al.*, vol.v, p.133.
6. 'Adī's Kāmil has been quoted by Jazā'irī in his *Taujīh al-Nazar ila Uṣūl al-Athar* (Egypt 1328 A.H.), p.114.
7. 'Uthmān b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. al-Salāh, *'Ulūm al-Ḥadīth* (Egypt 1326 A.H.), p.154.
8. Al-Suyūṭī, *op. cit.*, p.254.
9. *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenlandischen Gesellschaft* (Leipzig), xxiii, p.600.
10. Ibn Nadīm, *al-Fihrist* (Leipzig 1871-72), pp.228, 199.
11. *Der Islam*, viii, p.47.
12. Ibn Nadīm, *op. cit.*, p.99 ff.
13. *Ibid.*, pp.230, 231, 233; Muṣṭafa b. 'Abdullāh Ḥajī Khalīfah, *Kashf al-Zunūn* (Leipzig 1835-42), vol.ii, p.141.
14. Ibn Hajar 'Asqalānī, *al-Iṣābah fī Tamyiz al-Ṣahābah* (Calcutta 1856-88), ed. A. Sprenger, Muḥammad Wajīh, *et.al.* vol.i, intro. p.i.
15. D. S. Margoliouth, *Lectures on Arabic Historians* (Calcutta 1930), p.7 ff.
16. In Suyūṭī's abridgement.
17. Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. 'Alī al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tā'rikh Baghdād*, vol.v, p.321 ff.
18. Ibn Nadīm, *op.cit.*, p.171.
19. Abū Zakariyā Yahyā al-Nawawī, *Tahdhīb al-Asmā'* (Göttingen 1842-47), ed F. Wüstenfeld, p.7; Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-A'yān* (Göttingen 1835), ed. F. Wüstenfeld, No.656.
20. Ibn Sa'd, *op. cit.*, editor's intro., pp. xxx *et seq.*
21. Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad al-Balādhurī, *The Origins of the Islamic State* (tr<sup>l</sup> of *Futūh al-Buldān*) (Columbia Univ. 1924), tr. Phillip Hitti, F.C. Murguen vol.i, intro. p.9.

22. Ibn Hajar, *op. cit.*, vol.i, p.1.
23. For the importance of 'theological local historiography' reference may be made to the following passage (attributed to Sālih b. Ahmad, the author of *Tabaqāt al-Hamadhāniyyīn*):  
 "When religious scholarship has been cultivated in a place and scholars lived there in ancient and modern times, the students of traditions there and all those interested in traditions should begin with a thorough study of the Hadīth of their hometown... After the student knows what is sound and what is unsound in their traditions, and is completely acquainted with the Hadīth scholars in his city and their conditions, he may occupy himself with the traditions of other places and with travelling in search of traditions". (al-Khatīb, *op.cit.*, vol.i, p.214: cited in *A History of Muslim Historiography* by Franz Rosenthal, p.144).  
 On this question, also see 'Uthman b. 'Abd al-Rahmān, *op.cit.*, p.100 ff.
24. The only earlier history of the city by Tayfūr Ahmad b. Abī Tāhir (204-280 A.H./819-983 A.D.) of which only the sixth volume has been known, lithographed and translated into German by H. Keller, deals with the history of the Caliphs.
25. Abū 'Abdullāh Yāqūt b. 'Abdullāh, *Mu'jam al-Udabā'* (London 1923-25), ed. D.S. Margoliouth, vol.i, pp.248-249.
26. Hājī Khalīfah, *op. cit.*, vol.ii, p.119 ff.
27. Ibn Khallikān, *op. cit.* Nos. 32, 631.
28. *Ibid.*, No. 626.
29. Hājī Khalīfah, *op. cit.*, vol.ii, p.125 ff.
30. Ibn Khallikān, *op. cit.*, No. 406.
31. *Ibid.*, No. 672.
32. Yāqūt, *op. cit.*, vol.i, p.410; Hājī Khalīfah, *op. cit.*, vol.ii, p.143.
33. Ibn Khallikān, *op. cit.*, No. 502.
34. Hājī Khalīfah, *op. cit.*, vol.ii, p.157.
35. *Ibid.*, pp.140 ff.
36. Qur'an, 24:12.
37. *Ibid.*, 9:30.
38. Mullā Jīwan, *Nūr al-Anwār* (commentary on *al-Manār*) (Calcutta 1359 A.H./1940 A.D.), p.180; 'Abd al-Rahmān Mubārakpūrī, *Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī* (*Tuhfat al-Ahwadhī*) (Delhi 1346-1354 A.H.), vol.ii, p.197.
39. Al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmi'* (Delhi 1315 A.H.), vol.i, p.141.
40. *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (Delhi 1309 A.H.), vol.i, p.61: *Bāb al-Tayammum*.

41. *Ibid.*, vol.i, p.10.
42. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Egypt 1309 A.H.), ed. Muḥammad al-Zuhrī vol.i, p.141.
43. Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūfī, *Tadrib al-Rāwī* (commentary on al-Nawawī's *al-Taqrīb wa'l-Taysīr*) (Egypt 1307 A.H.), p.9.
44. Al-Shāfi'ī, *al-Risālah* (Cairo 1312 A.H.) p.99.
45. According to the traditionists, the term *al-Ṣaḥīḥ* does not mean that the tradition is actually true and genuine, but that it fulfils the conditions laid down by them for a reliable tradition.
46. Qur'an, 59:7.
47. Al-Dārimī, *Sunan* (Kanpur 1292-93 A.H.), ed. 'Abd al-Rashīd al-Kashmīrī, p.26.
48. *Ibid.*, pp.32-33.
49. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol.ii, p.124.
50. *Ibid.*, p.137; al-Shāfi'ī, *op. cit.*, p.114.
51. Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan* (Delhi 1346 A.H.), ed. 'Abd al-Aḥad, vol.i, p.52.
52. On *Ra'y* and *Qiyās* see *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, book "*I'tisām*", ch. *dhamm al-rā'y et. el.*, and 'Asqalānī's commentary on the same.
53. Al-Shāfi'ī, *op. cit.*, pp.118-120.
54. See 'Asqalānī's commentary on *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, book *Fard al-khumus*, ch. *Qismat al-Imām*, and various other places.
55. *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, vol.ii, p.264; Shāh Walīyullāh Dihlawī, *Hujjat Allāh al-Bālighah* (Lahore 1351 A.H.), vol.i, pp.249-50.
56. Al-Dārimī, *op. cit.*, p.26 ff.; al-Shāfi'ī, *op. cit.*, pp.117-19; and Abū 'Umar Yūsuf b. 'Abdullāh b. 'Abd al-Barr, *Jāmi' Bayān al-'Ilm wa Fadliḥ* (Cairo), vol.ii, pp.31-33.
57. Shibli Nu'mānī, *al-Farūq* (Lucknow 1898), vol.ii, p.196.
58. Joseph Schacht, *Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*.
59. As has been pointed out by Robson. See pp.25-26 in his article on "*Isnād*", *op. cit.*
60. Al-Suyūfī, *op. cit.*, p.100.
61. *Ibid.*, p.99.
62. Al-Nishāpūri, *Ma'rīfat 'Ulūm al-Hadīth*, p.58 ff. These traditions have been quoted by Robson (*op. cit.*).
63. Al-Suyūfī, *op. cit.*, p.48.
64. *Ibid.*, p.89.

65. *Kitāb al-Mawdu'āt.*
66. *Al-La'ālī al-Masnū'ah fī 'l-Aḥādīth al-Mawdu'ah.*
67. Al-Shawkānī, *al-Fawā'id al-Majmū'ah fī Bayān al-Aḥādīth al-Mawdu'ah* (Lahore 1223/1323? A.H.).
68. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, *kitāb al-Anbiya*, *bāb khalq Ādam*; Ibn Hajar 'Asqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī* (commentary on *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*) (Egypt 1319 A.H.). ed. Mahmūd Taḥṭāwī vol.vi, p.230.
69. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, k. *al-Sulḥ*, ch. I; also see *Fath al-Bārī*, *ad. loc.*
70. See "Ibrahim" (the son of the Prophet) in Ibn 'Abd al-Farr. *al-Istī'āb fī Ma'rifa al-Ashāb* (Hyderabad 1318 A.H.) and Ibn al-Athīr, *Uṣd al-Ghābah fī Ma'rifa al-Ṣaḥābah* (Egypt 1280 A.H.). For another version of this Ḥadīth, see *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, vol.ii, p.434.
71. Ibn Qayyim Jawziyyah, *Zād al-Ma'ād* (Kanpur 1298 A.H.), p.97.
72. Al-Hajar, *op. cit.*, vol.viii, p.354.

# 5

## THE SUNNAH — ITS DEVELOPMENT AND REVISION

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The root *Sin-Nūn-Nūn*, from which the word *sunnaḥ* is derived, has the basic sense of clarity, straightness, continuity and extension forward.<sup>1</sup> Most helpful in this connection is the co-derivative *sanān*, meaning the clear pathway unfolding itself in a line in front of the traveller. The parallel is true in respect of original connotation as well as secondary usage, i.e., the distinctive mode of behaviour. Yet whenever 'Sunnah' in particular is spoken of, the thought is invariably moved to the point of its origination in the past, which, of course, determines the essential character of it. The traveller — I mean the purposeful traveller — may stand at any point on the pathway, but he will always carry the extension of it backwards in his wakeful mind, while the extension forward is set clear before his eyes.<sup>2</sup> That is why Sunnah is for the sake of distinction always ascribed to its originator and caretaker, e.g., *sunnat al-Rasūl wa sunnat Allah*.<sup>3</sup> The ascription may sometimes be only understood, but it is always there as a pointer to the character of the Sunnah and, what is more important, to the direction of its extension and



development.

The antithesis of Sunnah is *bid'ah*, the root from *Bā'-Dāl-'Ayn* 'being characterised by lack of previous model and discontinuity with the past.'<sup>4</sup> Even technically *bid'ah* is but the deviation from the direction of future advance as set down and indicated in the past. It is like an artificial canal diverting the waters of a stream from the natural course followed by it up to the point of diversion.

Of crucial importance is the fact that Sunnah refers in the main to practice as distinct from any documentation of it (Hadīth). That is to say, the act is played without a script; the action is in itself normative, forming the basis of legal codification afterwards and not vice versa. It never occurred to the immediate followers to seek sanction from the conduct of the Prophet beyond itself. The Prophet himself made it clear in so many words that he was following the direct method of instituting and perpetuating practice by personal example rather than by enunciation of statutory provisions of law.

To cite just a few instances, let us remember "Pray as you see me pray" and "Didn't you tell her that I do that myself".<sup>5</sup> Similarly, he never expounded in so many words how to perform ablution; instead, he only *demonstrated* the act which was almost simultaneously copied by the entire community and later on recalled and recorded by the learned few among them for academic purposes.<sup>6</sup>

Thus the focus of attention is the actual practice and not provisions of the law or the terms of the statute. That is not to say that there were no legal pronouncements, but the point is that they were only made to help characterise the practice and not to cover the same in all its details comprehensively and exclusively. In other words, the practice is the very embodiment of the law; it is coefficient with the terms of the law. The Qur'an only looks like a list of items, *Salāt*, *Sawm*, *Zakāt* etc., the exact connotation of which is not defined in legal terms but presented in the definitive form of model practice. To a true believer, therefore, *salāt* is mere label for the practice witnessed and emulated by him; he understands and fulfils the words of the Qur'an and the Hadīth with reference to the pertinent practice (Sunnah) and not independently of it.<sup>7</sup> Even in the

rare cases of somewhat detailed laws, such as the Qur'anic verse on inheritance and the Prophet's instructions on *Zakāt* practice remains the final arbiter on points of interpretation and amplification. The vital concern is the conformity of *act to act*, the act of a believer to the act of the Prophet — not the mere compliance of the act with the express terms of the law. It is quite natural that, while demonstrating a practice, the Prophet should have dropped a hint or given certain directions here and there, but obviously such words are only a support to the practice which establishes the precise intent of the words. This is amply borne out by the agreed principle that the mere performance of an act within the sight or the knowledge of the Prophet without any verbal pronouncement on his part is a valid source of law.

When it came to the formulation of the doctrine of Islamic jurisprudence, a good deal of confusion and not a little of controversy were caused by tearing the Sunnah from the Qur'an, confronting the one with the other and invoking the awkward question as to which abrogates or prevails over the other. One cannot help being struck by the fact that all shades of opinion were agreed on the validity of the Sunnah in principle; they differed only in regard to their ability or inability to view the Qur'an and the Sunnah as an integral whole. As we shall see later, the disintegration of the Qur'an and the Sunnah was brought about only as a consequence of the weakening of the binding force of *Ijmā'* during the period of political strife and religious indifference. However, once doubts were cast on the continuity and the purity of the Sunnah, the extremists on either side were kept fully engaged in disowning and rehabilitating its individual position, while the original unity and integrity of the Qur'an and the Sunnah was lost in the heat of controversy. It goes to the high credit of al-Shāfi'ī that he perceived the utter futility of the pleadings for the Sunnah as a separate entity, in which case it was bound to clash with the express words of the Qur'an here and there and thus provide the opponents with an argument against itself: Al-Shāfi'ī insisted on taking the Qur'an and the Sunnah *together* and *at par* so as to eliminate the very prospect of having the one set against the other. Most significant is his denial that Qur'an

constitutes the test of the veracity of the Sunnah.<sup>8</sup> If it were so then it would be quite easy to brush aside a good deal of the Sunnah. It was the cleverest ruse resorted to by the antagonists of the Sunnah working on the assumption on the duality of the Qur'an and the Sunnah. To cancel the Sunnah with the Qur'an was very safe and sure method indeed. Al-Shāfi'ī countered this by asserting and working out the unquestionable basic theory that there could not possibly be any inherent contradiction or discrepancy between the Qur'an and the Sunnah, both owing their origin to the divine source.<sup>9</sup> This theory was best formulated by him in the famous dictum: The Qur'an can be repealed only by the Qur'an and the Sunnah can be repealed only by another Sunnah. The net result is the integration of "the *Kitāb* and the Sunnah" into one single unit — the *Kitāb-Sunnah* — so as to make room for the application of the accepted modes of exposition, *wujūhul bayān*, to the unit as a whole, instead of limiting the process to any one constituent separately. The Sunnah then becomes complementary with the Qur'an particularising the common, and explaining and amplifying the general statements in it.<sup>10</sup> An illustrative example of such reconciliation (*ta'wīl*) between the Qur'an and the Sunnah is provided by the words of the Qur'an and the practice of the Prophet in regard to the punishment for adultery and fornication.<sup>11</sup> Most logical is the proposition that a Sunnah, even though repealed by the Qur'an, must of necessity be replaced by another Sunnah if the Prophet could not but put the new directive into practice.<sup>12</sup> As a matter of fact, al-Awzā'ī (d. 157/9 A.H.) had declared long before al-Shāfi'ī (d. 204 A.H.) that "the *Kitāb* need the Sunnah more than the Sunnah needed the *Kitāb*".<sup>13</sup> The Sunnah can even initiate, without reference to the Qur'an, a permission or prohibition.<sup>14</sup> The organic relationship between the Qur'an and the Sunnah is best expressed by al-Shātibī, who compares the Sharī'ah to a complete human body — it is the whole body that speaks and not any particular part of it. Some controversialists did not mind asserting rather impudently that "the Sunnah prevails over the Qur'an". Ahmad b. Hanbal, however, knew full well that it meant no more than that the Sunnah explains and amplifies the Book.<sup>15</sup>

To turn to the transmission of the Sunnah, let us remember the difference between Sunnah (practice) and its documentation, the Hadīth. Practice is best transmitted through practice. So long as the practice is unbroken and untainted, it constitutes a proof of itself by itself; it does not depend for its validity on any documentation of it. And because the practice is normative in itself no documentary proof or statutory sanction behind it is called for. All that is needed is an assurance about the continuity and the purity of the practice, which is *ipso facto* grounded in the Divine will. That is exactly the way the early Muslims looked at it in the period immediately following the death of the Prophet. Naturally the *Sahābah* (Companions) were the custodians of the Sunnah of the Prophet. Whatever the *Sahābah* practised was presupposed to be continuation of the practice of the Prophet.<sup>16</sup> Again the main concern of the faithful was the conformity of act to act, the graceful devotion to the practice of the living models of the Sunnah. A further development was that the various *Sahābah* dispersed and took up residence in the different parts of the newly-conquered empire, thus becoming the model of the Sunnah, each in his own sphere of influence. These living models were the purveyors of a living tradition which was accepted on living faith by the collective will of the community.

But apart from practice, the *Sahābah* were also preceptors, narrators and teachers. It was but natural that wherever the *Sahābah* went the people would throng around them and eagerly expect them to talk (*haddatha*) about the Prophet and his ways. Now this free talk, designed to cater to religious fervour, was fraught with great danger for the unity of the thought and uniformity of action among the nascent community. The first two Caliphs, Abū Bakr and 'Umar, therefore adopted a positive and firm policy in this regard. The Hadīths fall into two broad categories: (1) the legal traditions bearing on the practical laws of *Fiqh* and (2) the non-legal traditions concerning matters of belief, dogma, etc. The second category of non-legal traditions is a great danger to the unity of thought and belief. Further, it is the kind of Hadīth most liable to misunderstanding, misreporting and distortion in the course of transmission, not to speak of the temptation to outright forgery.

Lastly, it is this particular kind of Hadīth which can safely be dispensed with in view of the fact that all that concerns the belief and the dogma is exhausted in the Book.<sup>17</sup> And let us not forget that this is the kind of rapturous, emotional Hadīth that was bound to be very popular among the masses, so much so that it could and did undoubtedly turn the attention away from the Book. The first two Caliphs were far sighted enough to ban indulgence in this kind of Hadīth. Though the ban is couched in general terms, yet all evidence, contextual and historical, goes to prove that it was limited to the particular circumstances indicated above.<sup>18</sup> It had a very salutary effect which is only set off by the evils that arose as soon as the ban was violated.

As for the legal traditions, the two Caliphs invariably issued a general call to come forward with such practice or ruling of the Prophet as might be known to anyone on issues that confronted the community in its onward march from time to time.<sup>19</sup> Here again we have to note that the two Caliphs asked for traditions only when there was a real concrete problem for practical decision. In keeping with the manners taught by the Prophet himself, the two Caliphs would just debunk all theorising based on mere hypothesis.<sup>20</sup> Secondly, they would subject every tradition proffered to scrutiny in the manner of a statement made in a court of law.<sup>21</sup> Their judgment as to adoption or rejection of a particular tradition was accepted by the entire community and assimilated as part of the Sunnah. In this way, it is most important to note, there was no gap between Sunnah or actual practice on the one hand and the traditions known to be in circulation on a point of law on the other. The force of the consensus was so strong as to eschew once for all isolated traditions at variance with the actual practice, the continuity and purity of which was still beyond all doubt. There was a clear division of the traditions into "recognised" and "unrecognised". The recognition was accorded by the consensus to traditions which were either (1) generally known to the people, or (2) related by trustworthy persons and accepted as true and worthy of practice by the jurists in the first instance and the general body of believers on trust from the jurists. It is also in the fitness of things that the traditions from the Prophet

be of two kinds (1) *khabr 'āmmah* i.e., of common interest to all the people in the normal way of life and (2) *khabr khāṣṣah*, i.e., special directives on matters of rare occurrence.<sup>22</sup> These latter directives were furnished to those who asked for them or who were concerned with them in the first instance. They were recalled only when an occasion arose in due course for standardising a common practice on the points involved. It is up to the jurists to scrutinise such statements and to recognise or reject them. In fact this constitutes the main source of difference so far as the bases of *Fiqh* are concerned apart from manners of understanding and interpretation.<sup>23</sup> However, the jurists were too honest to suppress the traditions which they preferred to ignore. These existed throughout side by side with the contrary practice until they became the main weapon which was hurled by al-Shāfi'ī against the followers of all the ancient schools of the Hijāz, Iraq and Syria alike.<sup>24</sup>

Both the Caliphs Abū Bakr and 'Umar, also entertained for quite a long time the idea of compiling an authentic corpus of traditions and ultimately gave it up lest it should prove a distraction from the Qur'an.<sup>25</sup> At first sight it appears rather incongruous that the two Caliphs, and the early Muslims for the matter of that, should be so eager to collect and assimilate all traditions in their actual life and yet be wary of their potentiality in written book form for distraction from the Qur'an. This can only be reasonably explained by the fact that it is well-nigh impossible to guarantee the text of the traditions even though their gist and directive content may be established beyond reasonable doubt. No wonder that the transmitters trembled in fear while ascribing any words in the direct form of narration to the Prophet. And yet a written record of the traditions is most likely to create the impression that it represents the actual words of the Prophet in the same way as the Book is the word of Allah. This is evidenced by the tendency to dilate upon the rhetorical and the grammatical points in the traditions as if they were the actual words of the Prophet. It has been aptly noted that most of the traditions only convey the purport without transmitting the actual words of the Prophet; hence the early grammarians were loath to rely on traditions in linguistic studies. The view was pushed to the

extreme by Ibn al-Dā'i and Abū Hayyān, who criticised Ibn Mālik for the opposite view and the unprecedented practice of citing traditions in points of grammar. Al-Shātibī takes up a very reasonable moderate position by making an exception in favour of a particular class of traditions which, according to the wont of the Arabs, were preserved verbatim, specially for the sake of their eloquence and literary beauty. To this class belong a few carefully written texts, passages from sermons, proverbs and short, pithy sayings which were often quoted and diligently studied in literary circles.<sup>26</sup> This is fully acknowledged by men of letters such as al-Jāhiz, who confidently asserts that no corruption has even crept into the text of the sermons of the Prophet.<sup>27</sup>

Anyway, the documentation of the Sunnah went on from the very early times through oral tradition as well as written record as a mere aid to memory according to the characteristic outlook of the Arabs.<sup>28</sup> The scruples on the point of committing to writing achieved just the result that was desired, namely, the maintenance of the unimpeachable purity of the Book and the driving home of the true worth of the traditions, particularly in so far as the personal factor of the transmitters was involved. But, as pointed out at the very outset, the Sunnah (practice) is preserved and transmitted through practice independently of documentation. And so far as the Sunnah fortified by the consensus of the community is concerned, it never stood in any doubt until the solidarity of the *jamā'ah* was rent asunder by *fitnah* and *bid'ah*. Only certain features of the transmission and development of the Sunnah are to be noted:

After the death of the Prophet it was the privilege of the *Sahābah* individually and collectively to maintain the Sunnah of the Prophet as they knew it and as they came to know of it from time to time on evidence to their satisfaction. With evident justification the Sunnah of the Caliphs was taken *ipso facto* to be the same as the Sunnah of the Prophet.<sup>29</sup> Even their rulings and judgments based on deduction were immediately passed into the practice of the Community, while the documentation of them followed the same lines as the traditions of the Prophet. In common usage it was deemed enough to ascribe a practice to the custodians of the Sunnah

without going further into the testimony on which it was based.

It will be borne in mind that the living tradition of a rising community must of necessity be susceptible to growth and development so as to fulfil the demands of a progressive life. Actually the Sunnah of the Prophet was growing according to its own nature in the course of its transmission onwards. To take an illustrative example, a drunkard was only meted out some indefinite form of humiliation during the lifetime of the Prophet, and this was deemed enough to reinforce the strong general opprobrium. Later on as the incidence of the crime increased, the punishment was given the standardised form of 40 to 80 stripes.<sup>30</sup> Thus the Sunnah of the Prophet needed, like all living organisms, continuous feeding for its vigorous health and natural growth. The inexhaustible source of such feeding was no other than *Ijtihād* i.e. the effort in a spirit of dedication to the will of Allah to discover the line of advancement of the Sunnah in conformity with its own nature as established in the past. The instrument of *Ijtihād* is the *ra'y* or personal judgment, of which a particular form is the *Qiyās* or analogy.<sup>31</sup> The varying judgments of the individual jurists are mellowed down through the process of *Ijmā'* which assures the final assimilation of the new advance into the body of the Sunnah.<sup>32</sup>

Thus by the end of the period of the Righteous Caliphs the body of the Sunnah was composed of the following strands: (a) the *Kitāb* (b) the Sunnah of the Prophet and (c) the accumulated growth of the Sunnah through the judgments of the *Sahābah* jurists. All the three strands, however, were twisted into a single rope and, so far as practice was concerned, the entire body of the Sunnah constituted an indivisible, integrated whole. The hands and the feet may not be vital like the heart and the liver, but there can be no question of maiming the body on that account. An enquiry into the various components and the testimony for each of them was merely of an academic interest — among the learned ones a good deal of it was common knowledge, obviating the need for any systematic record. The legalistic differentiation between *fard* (compulsory), *mustahab* (commendable), *mubāh* (permissible), *makrūh* (reprehensible) and *harām* (forbidden) was still unknown.<sup>33</sup> Even if one knew, for



example, that gargling was not mentioned in the Qur'an, the thought of quibbling over the degree of obligation in this regard never crossed the mind of anyone performing the ablution in the *traditional* way.

Not more than a few persons among the *Sahābah* distinguished themselves by their capacity for *hukm* or *'iftā*, the prerequisite for which was a knowledge of the Sunnah together with juristic acumen.<sup>34</sup> They sometimes met in groups to discuss and thrash out differences of *ra'y*.<sup>35</sup> Their judgments, known as *'āthār* (sing. *'athar*) constitute the authoritative version of the Qur'an and the Sunnah. The opportunities for personal contact and visual experience of the act accompanying an edict do invest the collective body of the *Ṣahābah* with a privileged position of receptivity and the reverence shown to them and their words are more rational than emotional.<sup>36</sup> Hence it is said that the *tafsīr* (interpretation) of the *Sahābah* is as good as *tafsīr* emanating from the Prophet himself.<sup>37</sup> Of course, the isolated view of an individual *sahābī* is taken with the utmost reserve proportionate to the possibility of human error, which is only eliminated through corroboration or acceptance by the rest. But even the element of *ra'y*, specified in the *'athar* of a *sahābī*, has every claim to unrivalled authority, representing as it does an expert opinion, based on first-hand knowledge, as to the best way of maintaining the closest affinity with the existing body of the Sunnah in an unprecedented situation. Well has it been said by Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah that the *sahābī* is distinguished by special senses in addition to the senses shared by us all.<sup>38</sup> The schools, built largely on trust rather than dogmatic finesse, did accord to the *'athar* a position akin to the Sunnah of the Prophet. Al-Shāfi'i's insistence on the express authority of the Prophet in each case signifies only an extreme reaction to the intrusion of lay administrators in the development of the Sunnah.

After the death of 'Umar I the situation changed in several respects. The *Sahābah* migrated to the provinces and established themselves there as living models of the Sunnah and as teachers and founders of schools of religious learning. Particular mention must be made of 'Abdullāh b. Mas'ūd and 'Alī, who shifted their residence

to Kūfah. There they had to give rulings on such questions of law as were addressed to them from time to time. Their rulings were, of course, based on the same knowledge of the Sunnah that they had imbibed in Madīnah but were bound gradually to assume an individuality of their own in the new milieu.

Another important development was the violation of 'Umar's ban on the non-legal traditions and the unrestricted circulation of the legal traditions on the narrator's own responsibility. The result was that the *Qussās*, who had previously been turned out of the mosques by 'Umar, had a heyday with their hair-raising, blood-curdling statements on sins and their retribution, all ascribed to the Prophet. At times they would even confess that the liberties which they took with the authority of religion were justified by the end, which was to bolster up the general spirit of virtue without in anyway touching the legal structure of the *Shari'ah*.<sup>39</sup>

This free flow of the non-legal traditions coincided with the opening of the gate of *Fitnah*. The murder of 'Uthmān was the signal for the secession (*khurūj*) of various sects warring against one another and against the general body (*jamā'ah*) of believers. Let us not forget that though the struggle may have originally been of a political character, the structure of Islamic polity was such that each sect had to prove its *raison d'être* by variations in religious belief and ideology. But variations in religious belief and ideology were only possible in the first instance by isolating the Qur'an from the Sunnah, which isolation was a prerequisite of foisting one's own wishful interpretation on the former.<sup>40</sup> The point was clearly understood by 'Alī when he advised 'Abdullah b. 'Abbās "to avoid confining the argument with the Khawārij to the Qur'an alone inasmuch as the Qur'an was capable of various possible interpretations until reference was made to the Sunnah, which would place them in a tight corner."<sup>41</sup> As the upholders of *al-Sunnah wa'l-Jamā'ah* retaliated by hurling traditions specifically and pointedly directed at the secessionists, the latter only became outspoken and stubborn in their denial of the whole lot of traditions. Such was the case with the Khawārij; the Shi'ites also followed the same path, but, with the resources of the House of 'Alī at their command, were able

to set up a rival structure of traditions of their own.

It will, however, be seen that none of these secessionists was eager to alter the legal structure as built up in the previous age except in so far as it was demanded by the implications of the ideology which they were determined to uphold. The main points of departure so far as the Khawārij were concerned, were only those resulting directly from the radical doctrine of ostracism of the perpetrators of major sins. The Shi'ites differed mainly on the *Sunnah* relating to the bequest of the Prophet, which had a direct bearing on their ideology.<sup>42</sup> It is said that there are altogether seventeen points of difference between the Sunni and the Shi'ah *Fiqh*.<sup>43</sup> Further, it will be observed that excepting the *mut'ah* which is of significance for the social pattern all the points are just trivial and merely symbolic of dissidence. Typical of them all is the problem of *mash'alah-khuffayn* (that is the wiping of one's shoes instead of the washing of one's feet as part of the lesser ritual ablution under certain conditions), the denial of which is regarded as the acid test of Shi'ism on the one hand, and a sufficient cause for renegation in the view of the Sunnis (specifically Abū Hanīfah) on the other hand.<sup>44</sup> It is also not difficult to see that the acrimony over the issues of *mut'ah* and *mash'ala-khuffayn* is only due to the part played by 'Umar I in finalising the practice in regard to them.<sup>45</sup> And it is of the utmost significance in this connection that modern research has been able to discover a very close link between Abū Hanīfah, Sufyān al-Thawrī and their associates on the one hand, and Zayd b. 'Alī (d. 122 A.H.), the founder Imam of the moderate wing of Shi'ism (the Zaydiyyah) on the other hand. It is not surprising that the House of 'Alī should have taken a very creative part in the initial formulation and development of Sunni *Fiqh*.<sup>46</sup>

In short, while the *Fitnah* was on, right from the last days of 'Uthmān, the structure of the legal *Sunnah* survived more or less intact except in so far as the political and dogmatic tenets of the secessionists impinged upon it. Perhaps it could not be otherwise if only for the fact that no substitute could be found for the entire body of practical *Sunnah* within the pale of Islam. All the extreme anti-traditionists, the *ahl al-ra'y*, the *ahl al-kalām* (*mu'tazilah*) and the

Shi'ah, show themselves equally anxious not to fall into a vacuum by the displacement or any unnecessary disturbance of the common legal practice. It is this anxiety which forces the Mu'tazilah to take shelter behind the overriding authority of the consensus (*Ijmā'*), thus exasperating al-Shāfi'ī and eliciting from him the taunt that they would make use of one part of the Hadīth while nullifying the other part.<sup>47</sup> Even the Umayyads, who flouted many a provision of the law in their daily life and who introduced innovations in support of their own ideology, such as the cursing of 'Alī from the pulpit, made no overt attempt to question the validity of, or to tamper with, the legal practice as handed down from the past. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to assume that all was fair for the development of the Sunnah. The situation was deteriorating in several respects so as to culminate, as we shall see later, in the call for a reappraisal, i.e., a revision of the *actual practice* in the light of the ideal *normative practice* of the Prophet in so far as the latter could be ascertained from documentary proof of the same.

Firstly, the bursting of the dam set by 'Umar brought in a deluge of traditions freely circulated for what they were worth. We are here concerned with the legal traditions only. In regard to these traditions, the system followed by 'Umar was such that every tradition was tested and either rejected or assimilated into actual practice. The two essential features of this system were: (i) a strong predilection in 'Umar for general consultation, his eagerness to examine with an open mind the merits of every piece of evidence or suggestion submitted to him and his preparedness to revise his own views in the light of it, and (ii) his preeminent position as a jurist, *Ṣahābī* and Caliph, which ensured for his decisions the willing acceptance of the specialists as well as the common people.<sup>48</sup> Perhaps it would be true to describe it as a system of official registration of traditions.<sup>49</sup> This system, like many other conventions and institutions, broke down under 'Uthmān. Well has it been noted that the decisions of 'Alī commanded no wide acceptance because he was by nature averse to consultation and his authority and influence were limited to his immediate surroundings.<sup>50</sup> Thereafter the jurists were free to proceed on their own without the co-ordinating authority of

the Caliph and the state. Thus in the new situation everyone felt free to relate whatever he thought he could quite informally and it immediately went into circulation without a clear verdict as to its practical worth. Soon it became inevitable that there was a widening gap between actual practice and the growing mass of indeterminate traditions bearing on the practice, making it doubtful whether the actual practice was the same as the ideal normative practice.

Secondly, *bid'ah* crept into the growth of the Sunnah. It will be appreciated that the living practice of a community must of necessity grow if not on the right, then on the wrong lines. It cannot simply wait and remain at a standstill if the community loses the vigour to move consciously and confidently on the right course. The difference between *bid'ah* and Sunnah hangs by a thread only. As stated above, the element of growth in the Sunnah is the *ra'y* of the competent jurists<sup>51</sup> embedded deep into the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the past. It must be a natural growth from, and no grafting upon, the stem of the Qur'an and the Sunnah, even though it is called for where the two sources fail to provide guidance expressly and specifically. Al-Shāfi'ī's patent example illustrating the essential difference between well-founded and unfounded *Ijtihād* or *ra'y* is the situation of a person who is out of the range of sight from the Ka'bah and who does not know for certain the direction of it. Such a person is obliged to make an effort based upon such pointers as may be at hand; he is not free to turn to any direction according to his liking (*istihsān*) or unreasoned preference.<sup>52</sup> It follows that if at any time the competent jurists were not allowed to assert their *ra'y* as characterised above, the incompetent laymen would naturally step in and influence the growth of the living practice by their own non-conformist leanings through ignorance, misunderstanding, sheer indifference or even deliberate preference for selfish ends. This unfettered *ra'y* springing from non-religious, if not irreligious cunning, as opposed to dedicated learning and religious conscience, is the source of *bid'ah* — the contamination of the growth of Sunnah.<sup>53</sup> As we have seen just now, al-Shāfi'ī would also make *istihsān* (a favourite of Abū Hanīfah and not so repugnant to Mālik) converge with the *bid'ah* on lack of a foundation in the *shar'*, the

same charge to which Mālik has laid himself open because of his excessive attention to *al-maṣālih al-mursalah* (transmission).<sup>54</sup> Anyway it is well known that the Umayyad rulers, of course, with honourable exceptions,<sup>55</sup> were little concerned with the maintenance of the purity and the continuity of the Sunnah; the competent jurists were allowed no active and decisive role in the growth of the living tradition. It therefore grew under the aegis of the licentious cunning of the all-powerful administrative officials in the secular interests of the ruling dynasty. The revenue policy in general, and that of al-Hajjāj in particular, is the most glaring example in question.

One hears complaints about the infiltration of the *bid'ah* quite early; the Shi'ites and the Khārijites are particularly charged with the introduction of it. The process went on slowly throughout<sup>56</sup> until it grew in sufficient volume to have its full impact on the religious conscience of the community towards the end of the Umayyad period. The civil war beginning with the killing of the Umayyad Caliph, Walīd b. Yazīd (126 A.H.), indicates only the culminating point, which is evidenced by the vociferous cry for the restoration of the Sunnah at the time.<sup>57</sup> By this time the erstwhile confidence of the community in the purity and the continuity of the living tradition was rudely shaken. The revulsion against the contamination of the Sunnah through the influence of unscrupulous administrators finds its most vehement expression in the clear words of Abū Yūsuf that the Sunnah as asserted by the Hijāzīs "may possibly be only the decision of a market inspector or some provincial agent"<sup>58</sup>. Similarly, al-Awzā'ī's assertion of the Sunnah may only be based on the practice of "those who are ignorant of the correct ways of *wuḍū'* (ablution) and *tashahhud*, far less than the canons of jurisprudence."<sup>59</sup> The Sunnah, insists Abū Yūsuf, has to come down from the Prophet and the forebears from among his Companions and lawyers.<sup>60</sup> Though the same argument may be turned against the Iraqis in the course of polemics, this common scepticism of the current practice is quite characteristic of the time; al-Shāfi'ī only seized upon this old ferment and carried it to the extreme.

In due course of time the whole method of juristic thought underwent a revolutionary change. Previously it was reasonably safe

to argue from existing practice as proof positive of the sanction behind it in the sources of religion i.e., the *Kitāb* and the Sunnah fortified by the *Ijmā'*. Both the schools of the Hijāz and Iraq shared this feature in common, not to speak of the Syrian al-Awzā'i. Similarly, it was deemed quite enough to refer to the local purveyors of the Sunnah from among the *Ṣahābah*, the purity and the continuity of the Sunnah backwards being merely taken on trust. It will be seen that the method of *Irsāl* in the narration of Hadith is only an offshoot of this implied trust.<sup>61</sup> The loss of trust caused by the rampancy of *fitnah* and *bid'ah* prompted the demand for full testimony (*Isnād*), a demand which appeared to be an innovation for Ibn Sīrīn (d. 110 A.H.).<sup>62</sup> There was now a common insistence on a thorough probe into the documentary evidence of the Sunnah apart from the Sunnah itself. This gave an unexpected fillip to the Hadith narration, which had hitherto played a merely subsidiary role to the practice of the Sunnah. It now appeared quite logical to challenge the authority of the purveyors of the Sunnah with the authority of the Prophet for a relevant isolated Hadith in case of discrepancy. Al-Shāfi'i contended with the adherents of the old school in Baghdad on the same lines.<sup>63</sup> It also became problematic to adhere to *Qiyās* or reason in the face of isolated traditions. Ultimately the partisans of Hadith were paid back in their own coin when a rigorous probe was instituted into the veracity of the traditions themselves with reference to the personal character of the transmitters and several other circumstances attending upon the transmission.

Let us now turn to sifting the whole mass of legal traditions (not more than three thousand ) into three broad categories:

1. Traditions which formed the common knowledge of the community, i.e., were known to, and handed down by, a vast (indeterminate) number of people throughout the ages. Such traditions are in any case unquestionable. No particular testimony is called for in regard to them. This is an agreed principle even in so far as literature is concerned.<sup>64</sup> The unimpeachability of the Qur'an also rests, though, of course, in an incomparable degree, on the certainty of uninterrupted

transmission through the collective knowledge of the community. Quite reasonably the Sunnah (practice) has the same force of validity provided only that it be unadulterated and uninterrupted.

2. Traditions which reinforce the actual practice. As a matter of fact, a knowledge of such traditions is often implied in the practice and the rulings of the *Sahābah* even though there be no express mention of them, as pointed out by Shāh Walīyullāh, the *mawqūf* of many a *Sahābī* is as good as *marfū*.<sup>65</sup>

3. There only remains one particular category of traditions about the value of which the jurists hold different views. They are the isolated traditions, divergent from the beaten track of common practice, termed the *'āhād*. Such traditions, representing the individual knowledge of the transmitters but conforming to conditions for reliability, were often ignored by the old schools of the Hijāz and Iraq in favour of *Qiyās* or the rulings of the *Sahābah*, to which the practice was often traced. The traditions were not denied expressly but were yet eliminated from practice.<sup>66</sup> Al-Shāfi'ī was insistent that knowledge be acquired from the highest source, namely, the Prophet, even though it be in the form of an isolated tradition. After all, he argued, the traditions were statements solemnly affirmed and the jurists were bound to accept them as true while<sup>67</sup> the lower sources, particularly the *Sahābah*, cannot just be assumed to have derived everything from above. There must be documentary proof about it in each case, 'practice' having been discredited as a proof of itself by itself.

Al-Shāfi'ī was very anxious to bring about an agreement among the jurists of the various regions on the principles governing the recognition of the Sunnah, which was bound up with the vexed problem of the isolated traditions. It will be remembered that initially there was a sort of regionalism in *Fiqh*, a remnant of the influence of the various *Sahābah* in the localities around them. This



regionalism is to be distinguished from schools of *Fiqh* founded on differences of doctrine and transcending geographical limits. The colours that marked the different regions were only shades of a mixture of practice and traditions. Differences of *Ijtihād* and *ra'y*, understanding, interpretation and deduction — were also there but they stood on a different plane altogether. 'Umar I, by his characteristic insight, instituted a system which ensured agreement on the Sunnah but at the same time guaranteed full freedom of *Ijtihād*. He expressly made it clear that there was no question of a veto by the ruling authority on differences of *ra'y* among the competent jurists.<sup>68</sup> Ibn al-Muqaffa's caustic remarks on the loose thinking about the Sunnah are amply confirmed by the words of Abū Yūsuf mentioned above. But perhaps he would not mind if the authority of the Caliph usurped the functions of *Ijmā'* altogether.<sup>69</sup> Abū Ja'far al-Manṣūr was wiser, rather more diplomatic, in not depending on his own authority but seeking to invoke the prestige of Mālik to make the Iraqis fall in line with the Madinese by force. Mālik was conscientious enough to specify in the *Muwatta'* the basis of the best judgments of the Madinese in the Sunnah or *Ijtihād*.<sup>70</sup> Al-Shāfi'ī was only reiterating the position of 'Umar I when he pleaded for final agreement on the Sunnah with freedom to differ in matters of *Ijtihād*.<sup>71</sup> It is really unfortunate that a collective verdict on isolated traditions still remains a desideratum. The efforts of al-Shāfi'ī had only the effect of supplanting regionalism with allegiance to personalities and the principles which characterised their thought.<sup>72</sup>

Originally *Fiqh* denoted particularly the acumen of forming legal judgments on points untouched by the Qur'an and the Sunnah while *'ilm* referred to the memorised knowledge of the texts of the Qur'an and the Hadīth.<sup>73</sup> When developments under the Umayyads shook the complacency over the growth of the Sunnah, the scope of *Fiqh* widened to cover the whole corpus of law as traced to its sources in the canonical texts as well as *ra'y*.<sup>74</sup> The task which the zealous and industrious *fuqahā'* now set before them was to pass the X-ray of critical enquiry through the law in practice so as to detect malformations and insidious cancerous growth. In the course of the

searching examination, the bones, the sinews and the tissues all coved up with the outer skin of the Living Practice were carefully dissected and faithfully noted so as to present what we may call an Anatomy of Law. This is what it looks like when a single act of the Sunnah, such as the *wudū'* and the *salāt* is split up into various parts and each part termed differently (*fard*, *sunnah*, *rukṇ*, *shart*, etc.) according to the documentary authority for it. Naturally it was at this stage that Hadīth narration assumed its full importance.

There is little doubt that the first generation of Muslims was preoccupied with the practice of the Sunnah, most of which was known and transmitted in a practical way to most of the people. There was no emphasis yet on the documentation of it. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to assume that the practice grew without reference to the Prophet. On the other hand, the older the Sunnah the more it was under the aegis of the Prophet. It is essential to the very conception of the Sunnah that its origin or confirmed existence should be traceable to the model behaviour with or without reference to the text of the law. It was the warp and woof of the fabric of early Islamic society. This is only confirmed by the fact that, when it came to the expansion and development of the Sunnah in the new situations of a progressive life, the demand for *khābr khāṣṣah* was the first resort of everyone, the specialist (including the Caliph) as well as the common man. No time was lost in establishing the method of reporting and the test of reliability and acceptance after the clear example of 'Umar I. A little later it became a main cultural interest to carry the Hadīths from those who were expected to possess a knowledge of them. There should be no surprise if the element of trust played its part in the early days of Hadīth narration. Every listener does not always ask for testimony from one occupying the position of a *Sahābī* or *tābi'ī*. It is only the academician who cares for it for purposes of record and argument. The rampancy of *fitnah* and *bid'ah* induced a more critical attitude towards the whole circumstance of narration and reporting.

Anyway the point is that the narration of Hadīth had been going on closely parallel to the development of the Sunnah and the emergence of the regional schools of *Fiqh*. The *Sahābah* would leave

no stone unturned to collect all the relevant Hadīths before giving their verdict on any problem. A little later during the period of the younger *Sahābah* one finds a clear distinction between *ahl al-hadīth* and *ahl al-ra'y*, both existing side by side.<sup>75</sup> Even the latter would concern themselves equally with the Hadīths though it be for purposes of *ra'y* and deduction. It is only in such circumstances that al-Shāfi'ī could lay his hands on the traditions which were known to the old schools and yet eliminated from practice. The dominant mood during the late Umayyad period was not to accept and sanctify, but to doubt and purify; the actual practice of those days. The main point of interest, and, let us say, of controversy, was the Hadīths that went against the practice and not those which agreed with it. Al-Shāfi'ī's preference for isolated traditions going up to the Prophet only meant revision of the actual practice. Why such adverse testimony should be fabricated is beyond understanding. It is simply preposterous to insinuate that the whole mass of Hadīth together with the *Isnād* is only a faked attempt to put the practice of the late Umayyad period under the aegis of the Prophet. No people of any age can be gullible as to accept a fraud of this magnitude nor can the idea be entertained for a moment that a whole clever lot conspired just to take in upon the posterity.

## NOTES

1. *Sanna* in other quite distinct sense of whetting, sharpening is in all probability of foreign (Indian) provenance. Cf. Sanskrit *s'ana* whetstone [Williams, *Sanskrite-English Dictionary* (Oxford)].
2. 'Abd al-Nabey al-Ahmadnagrī, *Jāmi' al-'Ulūm* (Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif, Hyderabad).
3. See also the curse of an old woman on al-Hajjāj in *al-Bayān* (Cairo 1949), ed. 'A. Salām Hārūn, vol.III, p.271.
4. Al-Shātībī, *al-I'tisām* (Cairo), vol.I, pp.18-19. Also the verses of Hassān b. Thābit, *Diwān* (GMS 1910), vol.XXIII, pp.1 and 4.
5. The words of the Prophet to Umm Salāmah, who was asked about kissing during a fast — *Musnad al-Shāfi'ī* (Cairo 1951) vol.I, p.257.
6. Shāh Walīyullāh, *Hujjat* (Al-Munīriyah 1352 A.H.), vol.I, pp.140-41.

7. Al-Shāfi'ī, *Kitāb al-Umm* (Cairo 1321 A.H.), vol.VII, p.252, lines 19-20.
8. *Ikhtilāf* on the margin of *al-Umm*, (Būlaq 1325 A.H.), p.45.
9. The following three modes of exposition as between the *Kitāb* and the Sunnah may be noted:
  - i. *Tawdīh al-mujmal*
  - ii. *Takhsīs al-'ām*
  - iii. *Taqyīd al-mutlaq*

Further, there is a fourth general principle, which is an essential safeguard against the usual attempt of the non-conformists to play with words in isolation from this factual context and foist their own meaning upon them. This is termed "*ta'īn al-murād min muhtamil*", i.e., determining the desired meaning out of the several possibilities.
10. *Musnad al-Shāfi'ī: Kitāb al-I'tisām bi'l Kitāb wa'l Sunnah*, pp.19-21.
11. Al-Shāfi'ī makes "*al-yamīn ma'a'l shāhid*" a test case of this kind and gives several other examples under the same. See *Al-Umm*, vol.VII, p.79; also see *Al-Risālah* (Cairo 1940), p.64.
12. *Ikhtilāf*, p.48.
13. Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *Jāmi' Bayān al-'Ilm* (al-Munīriyah), vol.II, p.191.
14. *Al-Risālah*, p.92.
15. Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *op. cit.*, p. 191. In any case, one who tries to hold by the Book alone is bound to lose both the Sunnah and the Book. See the words of al-Shātibī, *op. cit.*, p.54.
16. Al-Shātibī, *op. cit.*, vol.I, p.62.
17. Mustafā 'A. Rāziq, *Tamhīd li Tārīkh al-Falsafah al-Islamīyah* (Cairo 1944), p.121.
18. Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *op. cit.*, vol.II, p.121.
19. Shāh Waliyullāh, *op. cit.*, vol.I, p.149.
20. *Ibid.*, p.141.; Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *op.cit.*, pp.140-42; *al-Umm*, vol.V, III (quoted in *al-Risālah*, p.150, note 1).
21. Vide the words of 'Umar to Abū Mūsā at 'Ash'arī, *al-Tirmidhī - Bāb al-Majā*).
22. *Al-Ikhtilāf*, pp.6-7.
23. Of the eight causes of differences among the jurists as enumerated by Ibn al-Sīd al-Batalyūsī, 1-4 concern the manners of understanding and interpretation, 5 the establishment and acceptance of Hadīth, 6 and 7 deduction through *Ijtihād*, *Qiyās* and *Naskh*, and 8, variety which is expressly permitted. *Al-Insāf*, Cairo 1319 A.H.

24. The words of al-Shāfi'ī quoted by Schacht, *Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*, p.21: "...I do not know why you transmit traditions: if you transmit them in order to show that you know them and diverge from them in full knowledge, you have achieved your purpose..." But Schacht would also disregard what he quotes in the pursuit of systematic conclusions or the opinions of Goldziher.
25. Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirah* (Abū Bakr); and Ibn Sa'd, *Tabaqāt* ('Umar).
26. For a full discussion on the point, see al-Baghdādī, *Khizānah*, vol.I, pp.5-7; *al-Salafiyyah*, vol.I, pp.23-28.
27. *Al-Bayān*, p.31.
28. The conclusion is arrived at after a threadbare discussion of the conflicting views by al-Baghdādī, *Taqyīd al-'Ilm*, Damascus 1949, p.8. It is important to remember that the writing of Hadīth resorted to quite early, passed through the following stages:
  - a. *Al-Taqyīd* — simple, occasional reading,
  - b. *Al-Tadwīn* — collection of scattered piecemeal recordings, and
  - c. *Al-Taṣnīf* — classification of collected material.
29. Al-Shātibī, *op. cit.*, vol.I, p.62.
30. Ḥaṣan Ahmad al-Khaṭīb, *Fiqh al-Islām* (Cairo 1952), p.94; and Mustafā 'Abd al-Rāziq, *op. cit.*, pp.158-163.
31. *Qiyās* is of two kinds: (i) That which is comprised in the connotation of the canonical text (*ma'qūl al-lafẓ*). This is tantamount to a mere exposition (*bayān al-'ishārah*). There is little room for any difference about it. (ii) That which only bears a likeness to the original cases. Here the jurists differ as to which of the original cases is more akin to the case in point. *Vide Risālah*, p.479. No. 1334 and al-Shawkānī quoted by Mustafā 'A. Rāziq, *op. cit.*, p.240.
32. *Ijmā'* is the ultimate mainstay of the sources and the methods of jurisprudence as well as of positive law. Apart from religious sanction, it is based on the rational assumption that though the knowledge of an individual — even the greatest individual — it may fail; the collective knowledge of the whole community is unfailing and absolutely dependable. It is the instrument of consolidating the ground of law step by step so as to be free of old engagements before entering into new ones. It is through *Ijmā'* that the dust of controversy settles down behind the line of legal advance. Without the retrospective guarantee furnished by the consensus, one would have nothing but a haze of dust hanging perpetually over all the problems that ever arose in the past and that may ever arise in the future.
33. "The five categories as such are as yet unknown to al-Shāfi'ī and his predecessors." — Schacht, *op. cit.*, p.133.
34. Shāh Waliyullāh, *op. cit.*, vol.I, p.132.

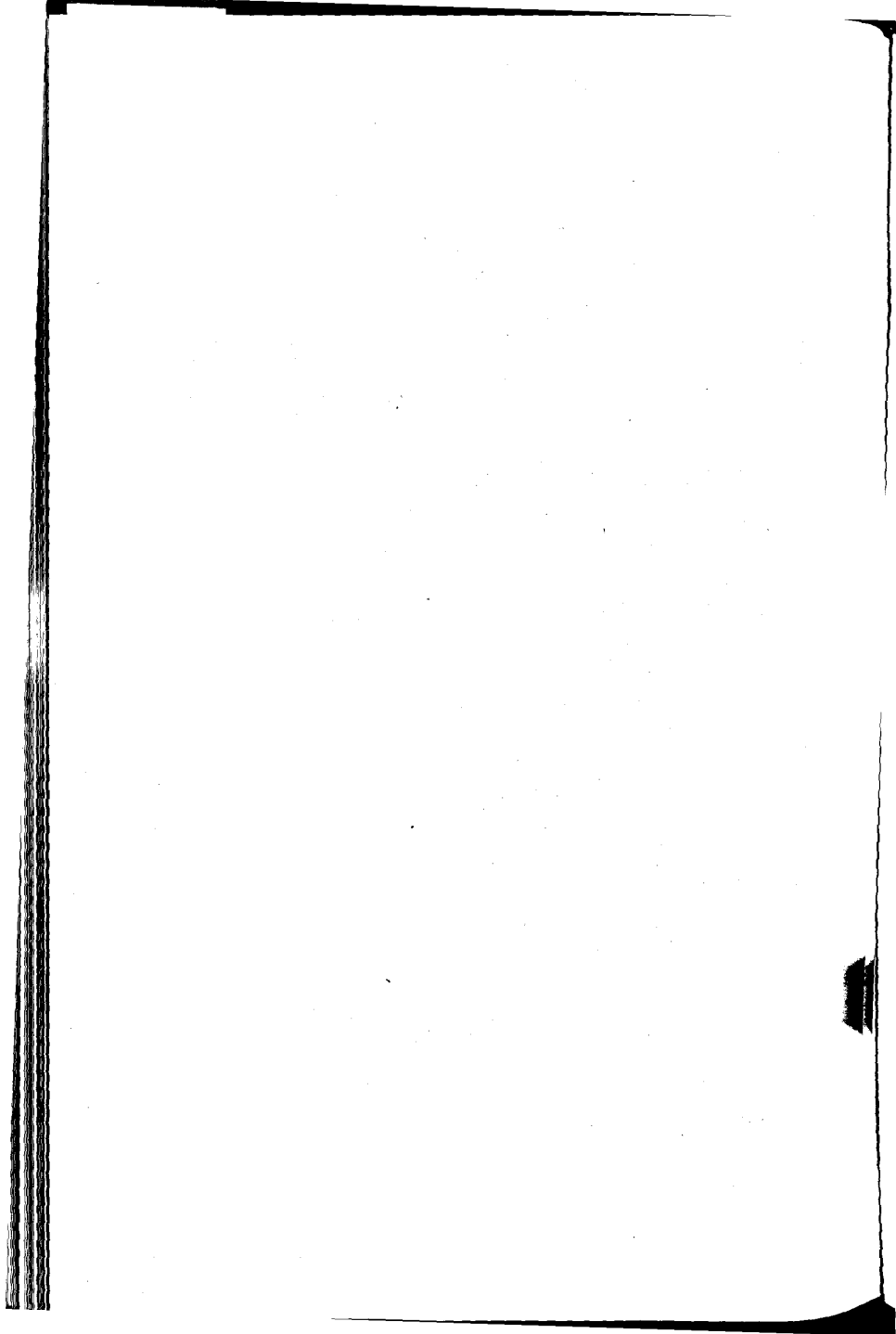
35. Six of the Prophet's *Sahābah* who discuss matters of *fiqh* among them are 'Alī, Abū Bakr, Abū Mūsā, 'Umar, Zayd and Ibn Mas'ūd (*al-Āthār al-Shaybānī*).
36. Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawzīyah, *T'lām*, vol.IV, p.133.
37. *Ibid.*
38. *Ibid.*, p.128.
39. *Al-Bayān*, vol.I, p.291.
40. The dissidents such as the Khawārij are called *ahl al-ra'y* in this very disparaging sense. *Vide a'* Shātibī, *op. cit.*, vol.I, p.72.
41. *Nahj al-Balāghah* (Beirut 1307 A.H.), vol.II, p.75 (quoted by Goldziher).
42. Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawzīyah, *al-Turuq al-Hikmīyah* (Cairo 1953), p.87.
43. Goldziher, *al-Aqīdah wa'l-Sharī'ah fī'l-Islām* (Cairo 1946), Pt.V. para.14.
44. *Ibid.*, p.201, note No. 110.
45. Schacht, *op. cit.*, pt. III, ch.9.
46. The view has received a very favourable consideration from Mustafā 'A. Rāziq, *op. cit.*, p.201.
47. *Al-Ikhtilāf*, p.47.
48. *Ibid.*, pp.17, 19-22.
49. Cf. Shāh Walīyullāh, *'Izalat al-Khifa'*.
50. Shāh Walīyullāh, *Hujjat*, vol.I, p.132.
51. Al-Shāfi'ī asserts (*al-Umm*, VII, p.86) that Shūra ('consultation' enjoined in the Qur'an, 42:38) is to be confined to the knowledgeable and righteous.
52. *Al-Umm*, vol.VII, p.251. See also *Ibid.*, pp.253 and 272. The best argument in the subject is the Qur'anic verse (75:36) cited on p.271. Also see *al-Risālah*, pp.24-75.
53. Al-Shātibī, *op. cit.*, ch. "al-Ra'y al-Madhmūm", vol.I, p.72.
54. Al-Juwaynī quoted by Mustafā 'A. Rāziq, *op. cit.*, p.227.
55. Al-Shātibī, *op. cit.*, vol.I, p.61.
56. The words of al-Hasan in *al-Bayān*, vol.III, p.133.
57. Revival of the Sunnah was the main plank of Yazīd b. al-Walīd, the foremost opponent of Walīd b. Yazīd. See al-Tabarī, *Tārīkh al-Rusul wa'l-Mulūk*.
58. *Kitāb al-Umm*, vol.VII, pp.303-4.
59. *Ibid.*, p.306.
60. *Ibid.*, p.320.

61. Even al-Shāfi'ī shows full cognizance of the point — *al-Risālah*, p.462.
62. Al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan K. al-'Ilal*. Here 'firnah' is used in the general sense (together with its concomitant *bid'ah*); it does not refer specifically to the civil war of 126 A.H., as supposed by Schacht, *op. cit.*, p.37.
63. Muṣṭafā 'A. Rāziq, *op. cit.*, p.225.
64. *Al-Bayān*, vol.III, p.95.
65. Shāh Walīyullāh, '*Izalat al-Khifa*'.
66. *Al-Risālah*, p.446, para.1227, quoted by Schacht, *op. cit.*, p.63.
67. *Al-Ikhtilāf*, p.7. See also *al-Risālah*, p.373 where the appropriate conditions for the acceptance of tradition and legal evidence are compared.
68. Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *op. cit.*, vol.II, p.59. See also al-Shātibī, *op. cit.*, vol.I, p.74. It is also important in this connection to bear in mind the difference between the essentials of the Sharī'ah and the purely administrative measures. There can be no *Ijmā'* on the latter. See the very useful discussion on *al-sharā'i' al-kulīyah* and *al-siyāsāt al-jaz'iyyah* in Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyah, *op. cit.*, pp.30-31. It is on the same lines as al-Shāfi'ī's thinking in regard to *khāṣ al-ahkām* (*al-Ikhtilāf*, pp.141-43).
69. *Risālat al-Ṣahābah (Rasā'il al-Bulaghā')* (1954), p.126.
70. May be Abū Ḥanīfah preceded Mālik in this respect.
71. *Al-Umm*, vol.VII, p.85.
72. Schacht, *op. cit.*, pp.7 and 10.
73. Muṣṭafā 'A. Rāziq, *op. cit.*, p.193.
74. *Ibid.*, p.205.
75. The *ahl al-hadīth* were the pharmacists, the *ahl al-ra'y* the physicians — Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *op. cit.*, vol.II, p.131.

**PART TWO**  
**THE PLACE OF HADĪTH**  
**AND SUNNAH IN ISLAM**

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# THE LIVING SUNNAH AND AL-SUNNAH WA'L JAMĀ'AH \*

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FAZLUR RAHMAN

## *Part A*

1. Sunnah is a behavioral concept — whether applied to physical or mental acts — and, further, denotes not merely a single act as such but in so far as this act is actually repeated or potentially repeatable. In other words, a Sunnah is a law of behaviour whether instanced once or often. And since, strictly speaking, the behaviour in question is that of conscious agents who can 'own' their acts, a Sunnah is not just a law of behaviour (as laws of natural objects) but a normative moral law: the element of moral "ought" is an inseparable part of the meaning of the concept Sunnah. According to the view dominant among more recent Western scholars, Sunnah denotes the actual

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\* *Preliminary Note:* It is strongly requested that the readers should read this article *in full*, a partial reading is liable to create grave misunderstandings. Readers are also requested *not* to quote *any part* of the article which, when torn from its context, does not represent the article as a whole.

practice which, through being long established over successive generations, *gains* the status of normativeness and *becomes* 'Sunnah'. This theory seems to make actual practice — over a period — not only temporally but also logically prior to the element of normativeness and to make the latter rest on the former. It is obvious that this view derives its plausibility from the fact that since Sunnah is a behavioral concept, what is actually practised by a society over a long period, is considered not only its actual practice but also its normative practice. This is especially true of strongly cohesive societies like the tribal ones. But, surely, these practices could not have been established in the first place unless *ab initio* they were considered normative. Logically, therefore, the element of normativeness must be prior. And although it must be admitted that the fact of a custom's being long established adds a further element of normativeness to it — especially in conservative societies — this factor is quite different and must be radically disentangled from the initial normativeness.

That Sunnah essentially means "exemplary conduct" as such and that actually being followed is not a part of its meaning (although the *fulfilment* of the Sunnah necessarily consists in being followed) can be demonstrated by numerous examples such as the following. Ibn Durayd, in his *Jamharah* (and he is followed in this by other lexicographers) gives the original meaning of the verb *sanna* as "*sawwara (al-shay'a)*" i.e., to fashion a thing or produce it as a model. Next, it is applied to behaviour which is considered a model. Here (and this is the sense relevant to us here) *sanna* would be best translated by "he set an example". It is in this sense that Abū Yūsuf admonishes Hārūn al-Rashīd (see his *Kitāb al-Kharāj*, the chapter on *Sadaqāt*) asking the Caliph "to *introduce* (as distinguished from 'to follow') some good Sunnahs".<sup>1</sup> In the same passage, Abū Yūsuf quotes the Hadīth, which may be very early, "whoever *introduces* a good Sunnah will be rewarded... and whoever *introduces* a bad Sunnah..." etc. If one asks how a Sunnah could be bad if its essential meaning is not to be actually followed by others but to be morally normative, the answer (given by the author of *Lisān al-'Arab*, s.v.) is that those who set bad examples wish, nevertheless, to be followed

by others and in most cases (perhaps in all cases) they do not think they are setting *bad* examples.

2. From the concept of normative or exemplary conduct there follows the concept of standard or correct conduct as a necessary complement. If I regard someone's behaviour as being exemplary for me then, in so far as I follow this example successfully, my behaviour will be thus far up to the standard or correct. There enters, therefore, an element of 'straightness' or correctness into this enlarged complemental sense of the word *Sunnah*. It is in this sense that the expression *sanān al-tarīq* is used which means "the path straight ahead" or "the path without deviation".<sup>2</sup> The prevalent view that in its primary sense *Sunnah* means "the trodden path" is not supported by any unique evidence,<sup>3</sup> although, of course, a straight path without deviation implies that the path is already chalked out which it cannot be unless it has been already trodden. Further, the sense in which *Sunnah* is a straight path without any deviation to the right or to the left also gives the meaning of a "mean between extremes" or the "middle way". In his letter to 'Uthmān al-Battī, Abū Hanīfah, while explaining his position with regard to a sinful Muslim, against the Khārijite extremism, describes his own view as that of *Ahl al-'adl wa'l-Sunnah* i.e., "people of the mean and the middle path". "As regards the appellation *Murjite* which you have mentioned (regarding my view), what is the crime of a people who speak with balance ('*adl* = justice) and are described by deviationists by this name? On the contrary, these people are (not Murjites but) people of balance and the middle path".<sup>4</sup> We shall show in a subsequent article how the term *sunnah* actually evolved into this sense and, further, that it was on this principle of the 'mean' that the *Ahl al-Sunnah* or the 'orthodoxy' came into being.

3. Among the modern Western scholars, Ignaz Goldziher, the first great perceptive student of the evolution of the Muslim Tradition (although occasionally uncritical of his own assumptions), had maintained that immediately after the advent of the Prophet his practice and conduct had come to constitute the *Sunnah* for the

young Muslim community and the ideality of the pre-Islamic Arab Sunnah had come to cease. After Goldziher, however, this picture imperceptibly changed. While the Dutch scholar, Snouck Hurgronje, held that the Muslims themselves added to the Sunnah of the Prophet until almost all products of Muslim thought and practice came to be justified as the Sunnah of the Prophet, certain other notable authorities like Lammens and Margoliouth came to regard the Sunnah as being entirely the work of the Arabs, pre-Islamic and post-Islamic — the continuity between the two periods having been stressed. The concept of the Sunnah of the Prophet was both explicitly and implicitly rejected. Dr. Joseph Schacht has taken over this view from Margoliouth and Lammens in his *Origins of Muhammedan Jurisprudence* wherein he seeks to maintain that the concept "Sunnah of the Prophet" is a relatively late concept and that for the early generations of the Muslims Sunnah meant the practice of the Muslims themselves.

We have criticized, elsewhere, the grounds of this development in Western Islamic studies and have attempted to bring out the conceptual confusion with regard to Sunnah.<sup>5</sup> The reason why these scholars have rejected the concept of the Prophetic Sunnah is that they have found (i) that a part of the *content* of Sunnah is a direct continuation of the pre-Islamic customs and mores of the Arabs; (ii) that by far the greater part of the *content* of the Sunnah was the result of the freethinking-activity of the early legists of Islam who, by their personal *Ijtihād*, had made deductions from the existing Sunnah or practice and — most important of all — had incorporated new elements from without especially from the Jewish sources and Byzantine and Persian administrative practices; and, finally, (iii) that later when the Hadīth develops into an overwhelming movement and becomes a mass-scale phenomenon in the later second and, especially in the third, centuries, this whole *content* of the early Sunnah comes to be verbally attributed to the Prophet himself under the aegis of the concept of the "Sunnah of the Prophet".

Now, we shall show (1) that while the above story about the development of the Sunnah is essentially correct, it is correct about the *content* of the Sunnah only and not about the *concept* of the

"Sunnah of the Prophet", i.e., that the Sunnah of the Prophet" was a valid and operative concept from the very beginning of Islam and remained so throughout; (2) that the Sunnah-content left by the Prophet was not very large in quantity and that it was not something meant to be absolutely specific; (3) that the concept Sunnah after the time of the Prophet covered validly not only the Sunnah of the Prophet himself but also the interpretations of the Prophetic Sunnah; (4) that the Sunnah in this last sense is co-extensive with the *Ijmā'* of the Community, which is essentially an ever-expanding process; and, finally (5) that after the mass-scale Hadīth movement the organic relationship between the Sunnah, *Ijtihād* and *Ijmā'* was destroyed. In the next article we shall show the real genius of the Hadīth and how the Sunnah may be validly inferred from the Hadīth-material and how *Ijtihād* and *Ijmā'* may be made operative again.

4. It may be gathered from the foregoing that the theory that the concept of the Prophetic Sunnah and even the content of the Prophetic Sunnah did not exist (outside the Qur'anic pronouncements on legal and moral issues) draws its force from two considerations viz., (1) that in actual fact most of the content of the Sunnah during the early generations of Islam is either a continuation of the pre-Islamic Arab practices or the result of assimilative deductive thought-activity of the early Muslims themselves, and (2) that the Sunnah, in any case, implies a *tradition*, as distinguished from the activity of one person. This latter statement itself both enforces and is enforced by the first. In sections 1 and 2 above of this article we have advanced evidence to refute this assumption and have shown that Sunnah really means "the setting up of an example" with a view that it would or should be followed. Indeed, the Qur'an speaks, in more than one place, of the "Sunnah of God that is unalterable" in connection with the moral forces governing the rise and fall of communities and nations.<sup>6</sup> Here it is only the ideality of the action-pattern of one Being viz., God that is involved. Now, the same Qur'an speaks of the "exemplary conduct"<sup>7</sup> of the Prophet, — in spite of its occasional criticism of the Prophet's conduct at certain

points (and this latter point constitutes a unique moral argument for the revealed character of the Qur'an). When the Word of God calls the Prophet's character 'exemplary' and 'great', is it conceivable that the Muslims, from the very beginning, should not have accepted it as a concept?

We have analyzed in our work mentioned before (see note 5) the letter<sup>8</sup> of Hasan al-Basrī written to 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān (65-85 A.H.). There, Hasan speaks of the "Sunnah of the Prophet" with regard to the freedom of the human will, although he admits that there exists no formal and verbal tradition from the Prophet about this matter. This gives us a positive clue to the understanding of the concept of the "Prophetic Sunnah" and we shall revert to it later. Further, the pro-Hāshimī poet of the first and early second century, al-Kumayt, says in one of his famous poems:

On the basis of what Book or which Sunnah do you regard my love  
for them as a disgrace?

'Them' here means the progeny of the Prophet and the Banū Hāshim in general. The 'Book' here is, of course, the Qur'an. What can the word *Sunnah* mean in this context except the Sunnah of the Prophet? This is certainly not the use of the word *Sunnah* in the sense in which expressions like "the Sunnah of Madīnah" etc. are used by early legists. Nor can Sunnah here mean the "middle path" for that nuance develops a little later — as in the case of Abū Hanīfah's letter mentioned above — after the conflict of theological opinion. The *Qasidah* in which the word occurs is said by the author of *al-Aghānī* to be among the earliest compositions of al-Kumayt and was, therefore, probably written *circa* 100 A.H. or even before.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the use of the term here does not suggest that it is a new one but assumes that this sense is fully established. We cannot even read here any radical Shi'ah theological complication into the word *Sunnah* for the poet is not an extreme dogmatic Shi'ah and explicitly says in one place that he neither rejects Abū Bakr and 'Umar nor calls them *kāfir*.<sup>10</sup>

In his *Kitāb al-Kharāj*, Abū Yūsuf relates that the second Caliph, 'Umar, once wrote that he appointed people in several places

to "teach people the Qur'an and the Sunnah of our Prophet".<sup>11</sup> It may be said that this reference is rather late (second half of the second century A.H.) and that at that time the concept of the "Prophetic Sunnah" had been formed. What is important here, however, is the circumstantial truth of the statement itself. 'Umar had sent people, it is certain, to different countries, especially to Iraq. He had emphasized, it is also certain, the teaching of Arabic and Arabic literature. It goes without saying that the Qur'an was taught as the nucleus of the new Teaching. But the Qur'an is obviously not intelligible purely by itself — strictly situational as its revelations are. It would be utterly *irrational* to suppose that the Qur'an was taught without involving in fact the activity of the Prophet as the central background-activity which included policy, commands, decisions etc. Nothing can give coherence to the Qur'anic teaching except the actual life of the Prophet and the environment in which he moved, and it would be a great childishness of the 20th-century to suppose that people immediately around the Prophet distinguished so radically between the Qur'an and its exemplification in the Prophet that they retained the one but ignored the other i.e., saw the one as divorced from the other. Did they never ask themselves the question — even implicitly — "why did God choose this person as the vehicle of His Message?" Completely nonsensical is that view of modern scholarship which, gained no doubt from later Muslim theological discussions themselves, makes the Prophet almost like a record in relation to Divine Revelation. Quite a different picture emerges from the Qur'an itself which assigns a unique status to the Prophet whom it charges with a "heavy responsibility"<sup>12</sup> and whom it invariably represents as being excessively conscious of this responsibility.<sup>13</sup>

5. There was, therefore, undoubtedly the Sunnah of the Prophet. But what was its content and its character? Was it something absolutely specific laying down once and for all the details of rules about all spheres of human life as Medieval Muslim Hadīth-*Fiqh* literature suggests?

Now, the overall picture of the Prophet's biography — if we



look behind the colouring supplied by the Medieval legal mass — has certainly no tendency to suggest the impression of the Prophet as a *pan*-legist neatly regulating the fine details of human life from administration to those of ritual purity. The evidence, in fact, strongly suggests that the Prophet was primarily a moral reformer of mankind and that, apart from occasional decisions, which had the character of *ad hoc* cases, he seldom resorted to general legislation as a means of furthering the Islamic cause. In the Qur'an itself general legislation forms a very tiny part of the Islamic teaching. But even the legal or quasi-legal part of the Qur'an itself clearly displays a *situational* character. Quite situational, for example, are the Qur'anic pronouncements on war and peace between the Muslims and their opponents — pronouncements which do express a certain general character about the ideal behaviour of the community *vis-à-vis* an enemy in a grim struggle but which are so situational that they can be regarded only as quasi-legal and not strictly and specifically legal.

A Prophet is a person who is centrally and vitally interested in swinging history and moulding it on the Divine pattern. As such, neither the Prophetic Revelation nor the Prophetic behaviour can neglect the actual historical situation obtaining immediately and indulge in purely abstract generalities; God speaks and the Prophet acts in, although certainly not merely *for*, a given historical context. This is what marks a Prophet out from a visionary or even a mystic. The Qur'an itself is replete with such evidence with regard both to the history of the past and the then contemporary scene. And yet the Message must — despite its being clothed in the flesh and blood of a particular situation — outflow through and beyond that given context of history. If we need a support besides an insight into the actual unfolding of the Qur'an and the Sunnah, we have on our side Shāh Walīyullāh of Dihlī and a historian like Ibn Khaldūn.

To revert to the Prophetic Sunnah. We have said that the early Islamic literature strongly suggests that the Prophet was not a *pan*-legist. For one thing, it can be concluded *à priori* that the Prophet, who was, until his death, engaged in a grim moral and political struggle against the Makkans and the Arabs and in organizing his

community-state, could hardly have found time to lay down rules for the *minutiae* of life. Indeed, the Muslim community went about its normal business and did its day-to-day transactions, settling their normal business disputes by themselves in the light of commonsense and on the basis of their customs which, after certain modifications, were left intact by the Prophet. It was only in cases that became especially acute that the Prophet was called upon to decide and in certain cases the Qur'an had to intervene.<sup>14</sup> Mostly such cases were of an *ad hoc* nature and were treated informally and in an *ad hoc* manner. Thus, these cases could be taken as normative Prophetic examples and quasi-precedents but not strictly and literally. Indeed, there is striking evidence<sup>15</sup> that even in the case of times of formal prayers and their detailed manner the Prophet had not left an inflexible and rigid model. It was only on major policy decisions with regard to religion and state and on moral principles that the Prophet took formal action but even then the advice of his major Companions was sought and given publicly or privately. "In the behaviour of the Prophet, religious authority and democracy were blended with a *finesse* that defies description."<sup>16</sup>

That the Prophetic Sunnah was a general umbrella — concept rather than filled with an absolutely specific content flows directly, at a theoretical level, from the fact that the 'Sunnah' is a behavioral term: since no two cases, in practice, are ever exactly identical in their situational setting — moral, psychological and material — Sunnah must, of necessity, allow of interpretation and adaptation. But quite apart from this theoretical analysis, there is abundant historical evidence to show that this was actually the case. The letter of Hasan al-Basrī mentioned previously is a glaring instance of this. In this letter, Hasan tells 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān that although there is no *Hadīth* from the Prophet in favour of the freedom of the will and human responsibility, nevertheless this is the Sunnah of the Prophet. What this obviously means is that the Prophet (and his Companions) *have shown by their behaviour* that the doctrine of predetermination contradicts the Prophet's *implicit* teaching. This passage of Hasan is highly revelatory of the Prophetic Sunnah as being rather a pointer in a direction than an exactly laid-out series of

rules, and demonstrates that it was precisely this notion of the "Ideal Sunnah" that was the basis of the early thought-activity of the Muslims, and that *Ijrihād* and *Ijmā'* are its necessary complements and forward reaches in which this Sunnah is progressively fulfilled.

6. The earliest extensive extant work on the Hadīth and on the Sunnah is the *Muwatta'*, of Mālik b. Anas (d. 179 A.H.). Mālik's wont is that at the beginning of each legal topic he quotes a Hadīth either from the Prophet, if available, or from the Companions, especially the first four Caliphs. This is usually followed by his remark: "And this is also the Sunnah with us", or "But the Sunnah with us is..." or, more frequently, "our practice (*amr* or '*amal*) is..." or, still more frequently, "Our agreed practice (*al-amr al-mujtama' alayhi*) is...". Again, with regard to the term Sunnah, sometimes he simply says, "The Sunnah with us is...", and sometimes, "The established Sunnah has been (*qad maḍat al-Sunnatu*)". We shall now analyze the use of these closely allied and legally equivalent but somewhat differing phrases.

Mālik quotes a Hadīth from the Prophet that the Prophet granted a certain person the right of *shuf'ah* i.e., the right of prior claim to purchase his partner's share of the property, which this partner wanted to dispose of. Mālik then observes, "And this is the Sunnah with us". Then he says that the famous lawyer of Madīnah, Sa'īd b. al-Musayyib (d. circa 90 A.H.) was once asked about *shuf'ah*. "Is there any Sunnah concerning it?", whereupon Ibn al-Musayyib said, "Yes, *shuf'ah* is applicable only to houses and land...".

Now, it is a matter of importance to notice the obvious difference between the two usages of the term 'Sunnah' in "This is the Sunnah with us" and "Is there any Sunnah with regard to *shuf'ah*?" Whereas in the one case it does mean "the practice" or "established practice in Madīnah", it cannot mean this in the second case, for one does not ask, in the face of an agreed practice; "Is there any Sunnah with regard to this?" In this case, then, Sunnah must mean an 'authoritative' — or "normative precedent". But whose normative precedent? Obviously in this case the 'Sunnah' is either the Sunnah of the Prophet or of any subsequent authority under the

general aegis of the Prophetic Sunnah, for we have already adduced evidence that the pre-Islamic Arab practice *as such* cannot be regarded as normative. But whereas it is clear that the Sunnah is under the *general* aegis of the Prophetic model, it is also clear that Ibn al-Musayyib *does not* mention the Prophet here. And Mālik quotes no Hadīth, in this matter, from the Prophet on the authority of Ibn al-Musayyib. It is thus obvious that the Sunnah in question could have been set by any Companion or a subsequent authority although it is not divorced from the *general* concept of the Prophetic Sunnah. Further, what these two statements on Sunnah in this particular case of *shuf'ah* conjointly imply is that Sunnah in sense (1) an exemplary precedent, becomes, in Mālik's time; Sunnah in sense (2) an agreed practice.

7. The necessary instrument whereby the Prophetic model was progressively developed into a definite and specific code of human behaviour by the early generations of Muslims was responsible personal free thought-activity. This rational thinking, called '*Ra'y*' or "personal considered opinion" produced an immense wealth of legal, religious and moral ideas during the first century and a half approximately. But with all its wealth, the product of this activity became rather chaotic i.e., the '*Sunnah*' of different regions — Hijāz, Iraq, Egypt etc. — became divergent on almost every issue of detail. It was in the face of this interminable conflict of free opinion that Ibn al-Muqaffa' (d. 140 A.H.) declared that there was no agreed-upon Sunnah of the Prophet and advised the Caliph to exercise his own *Ijtihād*.<sup>17</sup> But the intellectual and religious leaders of the community thought otherwise. Already, the individual free thought, *Ra'y*, had given way to more systematic reasoning on the already existing Sunnah and on the Qur'an. This systematic reasoning was called *qiyās*. On the other hand, the existing *Sunnah* — the result of earlier free opinion — was slowly reaching a point where it resulted in a fairly uniform acceptance by the community — at least regional communities like Hijāz, Iraq etc. This is why both the terms Sunnah and *Ijmā'* are applied by Mālik to this body of opinion, existing in Madīnah, almost equivalently. But although both

these terms are applied to this material, there is an important difference in the point of view inherent in each term. The 'Sunnah' goes backward and has its starting-point in the "Ideal Sunnah" of the Prophet which has been progressively interpreted by *Ra'y* and *Qiyās*; the *Ijmā'* is this Sunnah-interpretation or simply 'Sunnah' in our sense (2) above. as it slowly came to be commonly accepted by the consent of the community.

Between, therefore, the Qur'an and the "Ideal Sunnah" on the one hand and the *Ijmā'* or Sunnah in sense (2) on the other, there lies the inevitable activity of *Qiyās* or *Ijtihād*. Mālik, in his *al-Muwatta'*, fills continuous paragraphs by his own *ijtihād* despite his ceaseless invocation of the "general practice at Madīnah". But there is perhaps nothing more revealing of the *Ijtihād* activity in the existing literature of even the second century — when a fairly general common opinion was crystallizing throughout the Muslim world through the stabilisation of the Sunnah in sense (2) and through the growing number of new Hadīth — than the *Kitāb al-Siyar al-Kabīr* of Muḥammad al-Shaybānī, the younger of the two illustrious pupils of Abū Ḥanīfah. Al-Shaybānī died in 189 A.H. and his great commentator al-Sarakhsī (d. 483 A.H.) tells us<sup>18</sup> that this work is the last one written by al-Shaybānī. The bulk of the book consists of al-Shaybānī's own *ijtihād*, arising out of his criticism of early opinion. Quite apart from *Qiyās* i.e. analogical reasoning, al-Shaybānī has often recourse to *Istiḥsān* in opposition to earlier precedents and exercises absolute reasoning.

The number of Hadīths from the Prophet quoted by al-Shaybānī is indeed, extremely small. He quoted Hadīths frequently from the Companions and still more frequently from the 'Successors' (*Tābi'ūn* — the generation after the Companions). But he criticizes and rejects sometimes a Companion's opinions as well. One illustration will suffice here. The question under discussion is: What can an individual Muslim soldier appropriate for himself from the territory of a defeated enemy in view of the fact that the property of the fallen enemy does not belong to any individual Muslim but to the conquering Muslims as a whole? "It has been related from (the Companion) Abū'l-Dardā'," says al-Shaybānī, "that he said that there

is no harm if Muslim soldiers take food (from the enemy's territory), bring it back to their family, eat it and also make presents of it (to others), provided they do not sell it." Now, Abū'l-Dardā' seems to have included making food-presents among the necessities like eating (for the soldiers themselves are allowed to eat the food in order to keep themselves alive which is a necessity). But we do not accept this for whereas eating is a basic necessity... making food-presents is not."<sup>19</sup> In connection with this, al-Shaybānī says,

We accept on this point the Hadīth of the 'Successor' Makhūl (d. circa 114 A.H). A (Muslim) man slaughtered a camel in the territory of the Byzantines and invited others to share it. Makhūl said to someone from the Ghassānids: 'Won't you get up and bring us some meat from this slaughtered camel?' The man replied, 'This is plunder (i.e. has not been properly distributed according to the rules of *ghanimah*)'. Makhūl said, 'There is no plunder in what is permissible (i.e. food is allowed to be eaten)'.

Al-Shaybānī goes on,

It is also related from Makhūl that he said that anybody who brings back home something from the enemy territory that has no value *there* but which may be of use to *him*, is allowed to do so. But this would hold good, according to us, only in regard to those things which have no special value in *our* territory either. Things (which may be valueless in the enemy territory but) which become valuable in *our* territory must be returned to the *māl al-ghanimah*, for, by mere transportation the essence of a thing is not transformed. Makhūl regarded the *fact* of transportation as having become a constitutive quality of a thing — like a craft.<sup>20</sup>

Al-Shaybānī, after this criticism, proceeds to confirm Makhūl's *ijtihād* that if a Muslim finds some petty object in the enemy territory, say, a piece of wood, and by his own work transforms it into, say, a bowl, he is entitled to it. But he is not entitled to possess things which had been manufactured before he found them.

8. Examples of this type could be given almost endlessly but I have

chosen one lengthy illustration of *Ijtihād* to give a peep to the reader into the actual working of the mind of early *mujtahid* Muslims. It should be abundantly clear by now that the *actual content* of the Sunnah of the early generations of Muslims was largely the product of *Ijtihād* when this *Ijtihād*, through an incessant interaction of opinion, developed the character of general acceptance or consensus of the community i.e. *Ijmā'*. This is why the term Sunnah in our sense (2) i.e. the actual practice, is used equivalently by Mālik with the term *al-amr al-mujtama'* 'alayhi i.e. *Ijmā'*. Thus, we see that the Sunnah and the *Ijmā'* literally merge into one another and are in actual fact, *materially* identical. Even later, in the post-Shāfi'ī period, when the two concepts are separated, something of the intimate relationship between the two remains. For, in the later period, when Sunnah came to designate only the Sunnah of the Prophet and this not only conceptually and, as it were, as an umbrella-idea — even then the agreed practice of the Companions still continued to be called Sunnah — *Sunnat al-Sahābah*. But where Sunnah ceases, *Ijmā'* takes over. Thus, the agreement of the Companions is both *Sunnat al-Sahābah* and *Ijmā' al-Sahābah*. This in itself was not a harmful change, provided the important status of *Ijmā'* were not affected and its right to continue to assimilate and create new and fresh ideas and elements were not jeopardised. But what happened, unfortunately, in the post-Shāfi'ī period was precisely this and in the next section we shall portray this development.

9. We have, so far, established (1) that the Sunnah of the early Muslims was, *conceptually and in a more or less general way*, closely attached to the Sunnah of the Prophet and that the view that the early practice of the Muslims was something divorced from the *concept* of the Prophetic Sunnah cannot hold water; (2) that the actual specific *content* of this early Muslim Sunnah was, nevertheless, very largely the product of the Muslims themselves; (3) that the creative agency of this content was the personal *Ijtihād*, crystallizing into *Ijmā'*, under the general direction of the Prophetic Sunnah which was not considered as being something very specific;

and (4) that the content of the Sunnah or Sunnah in sense (2) was identical with *Ijmā'*. This shows that *the community as a whole had assumed the necessary prerogative of creating and recreating the content of the Prophetic Sunnah and that Ijmā' was the guarantee for the rectitude i.e. for the working infallibility* (as opposed to absolute or theoretical infallibility, such as assumed by the Christian Church) *of the new content.*

With this background in view, we can understand the real force of the famous second-century aphorism: "The Sunnah decides upon the Qur'an; the Qur'an does not decide upon the Sunnah", which, without this background, sounds not only shocking but outright blasphemous. What the aphorism means is *that the Community, under the direction of the spirit (not the absolute letter) in which the Prophet acted in a given historical situation, shall authoritatively interpret and assign meaning to the Revelation.* Let us give a concrete example of this. The Qur'an provides that for a decision in most cases (other than adultery etc.) the evidence of two males or one male and two females is required. In the established actual practice, however, civil cases were decided on the basis of one witness plus an oath. Some people objected to this practice and argued from the Qur'an. Mālik (*al-Muwatta'*, the chapter "*al-Yamīn ma'al-Shāhid*") confirms this established practice which had most probably arisen out of the exigencies of the judicial procedure. Mālik also quotes a Hadīth in this connection but ultimately relies on the established practice.

An important feature of this Sunnah-*Ijmā'* phenomenon must be noticed at this stage. It is that this informal *Ijmā'* did not rule out difference of opinion. Not only was this *Ijmā'* regional — the Sunnah-*Ijmā'* of Madīnah e.g. differed from that of Iraq — but even within each region differences existed although an *opinio generalis* was crystallizing. This itself reveals the nature of the process whereby *Ijmā'* was being arrived at i.e. through differences in local usage and through different interpretations a general *opinio publica* was emerging, although at the same time the process of fresh thinking and interpretation was going on. This procedure of reaching *Ijmā'* or a common public opinion was utterly democratic in its



temper. But at this juncture also a powerful movement had gained momentum to achieve standardization and uniformity throughout the Muslim world. The need for uniformity was pressing in the interests of administrative and legal procedures and tasks and that is why, as we have remarked earlier, Ibn al-Muqaffa' had advised the 'Abbāsid Caliph to impose his own decision in the absence of a universal agreement. This movement for uniformity, impatient with the slow-moving but democratic *Ijmā'*-process, recommended the *substitution* of the Hadīth for the twin principles of *Ijtihād* and *Ijmā'* and relegated these to the lowest position and, further, severed the *organic* relationship between the two. This seemed to put an end to the creative process but for the fact that Hadīth itself began to be created.

10. The mass-scale Hadīth movement, had already started towards the turn of the first century but gained a strong impetus during the second century in the name of a uniform authority — the Prophet — and in the sphere of jurisprudence was spearheaded by al-Shāfi'ī whose decisive and successful intervention in the freely-moving Islamic thought-stream resulted in the fundamental formulation of the principles of Islamic jurisprudence as the succeeding ages have known and accepted them. Especially, in our present context, his arguments concerning the nature of *Ijmā'* have been truly momentous. He ceaselessly argued that the claims of his opponents — the representatives of the older schools — to have arrived at a state of general *Ijmā'* were quite unacceptable; that, apart from certain basic facts, like the number of prayers etc., in fact not *Ijmā'* but difference prevailed on almost all issues, and that no formal council of Muslim representatives to reach agreements had been ever convened nor was such a step feasible.<sup>21</sup> He non-committally states the opponents' view — and on occasions only reluctantly allows it, viz. that the early Caliphs — especially Abū Bakr and 'Umar — used to make public appeals for people to come forward with information about the Prophetic Sunnah when specific issues arose about which the Caliphs themselves were not in possession of such information.<sup>22</sup> Actually, this argument of al-Shāfi'ī's opponents was part of a larger

argument that the Prophet's Companions had seen him behave in all sorts of situations and had acted in his spirit; that the succeeding generation had, in their turn, witnessed the behaviour of the Companions; and that through this process — involving mutual advice and criticism — by the third generation, the Prophetic Sunnah can be assumed to have been established *in practice* in the Community and, therefore, the vehicle of mass-scale Hadīth — beset with dangers of lack of verifiability — was not needed to support this Sunnah.<sup>23</sup> This argument was disallowed resolutely by al-Shāfi'ī. The argument about the public appeals of the Caliphs seems to be an artifice introduced by the *Ahl al-Ijmā'* as a defence against the *Ahl al-Hadīth*, and the proof of its artificial character is al-Shāfi'ī's scepticism towards it. But the larger argument had a great potentiality and apparently much truth. What weakened it in the eyes of al-Shāfi'ī, however, was the differences of opinion prevailing among the schools. "You do not possess agreement (*ijmā'*) but disagreement (*iftirāq*)", he insistently pointed out.

It is clear that al-Shāfi'ī's notion of *Ijmā'* was radically different from that of the early schools. His idea of *Ijmā'* was that of a formal and a total one; he demanded an agreement which left no room for disagreement. He was undoubtedly responding to the exigencies of the time and was but a monumental representative of a trend that had long set in, working towards equilibrium and uniformity. But the notion of *Ijmā'* exhibited by the early schools was very different. For them, *Ijmā'* was not an imposed or manufactured static fact but an ongoing democratic process; it was not a formal state but an informal, natural growth which at each step tolerates and, indeed, demands fresh and new thought and therefore must live not only *with* but also *upon* a certain amount of disagreement. We must exercise *Ijtihād*, they contended and progressively the area of agreement will widen; the remaining questions must be turned over to fresh *Ijtihād* or *Qiyās* so that a new *Ijmā'* can be arrived at.<sup>24</sup> But it is precisely this living and organic relationship between *Ijtihād* and *Ijmā'* that was severed in the successful formulation of al-Shāfi'ī. The place of the living Sunnah — *Ijtihād-Ijmā'* he gives to the Prophetic Sunnah which, for him, does not serve as a general directive but as

something absolutely literal and specific and whose only vehicle is the transmission of the Hadīth. The next place he assigns to the Sunnah of the Companions, especially of the first four Caliphs. In the third place he puts *Ijmā'* and lastly, he accepts *Ijtihād*.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, by reversing the natural order: *Ijtihād-Ijmā'* into *Ijmā'-Ijtihād*, their organic relationship was severed. *Ijmā'*, instead of being a process and something forward-looking — coming at the end of free *Ijtihād* — came to be something static and backward-looking. It is that which, instead of having to be accomplished, is already accomplished in the past. Al-Shāfi'ī's genius provided a mechanism that gave stability to our medieval socio-religious fabric but at the cost, in the long run, of creativity and originality. There is no doubt that even in later times Islam did assimilate new currents of spiritual and intellectual life — for, a living society can never stand quite still, but this Islam did not do so much as an active force, master of itself, but rather as a passive entity with whom these currents of life played. An important instance in point is Sufism.

### Part B

#### 1. Something more about the Sunnah

In part A, we had tried to underline the fact that the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet was an ideal which the early generations of Muslims sought to approximate by interpreting his example in terms of the new materials at their disposal and the new needs and that this continuous and progressive interpretation was also called Sunnah, even if it varied according to different regions. This point is so fundamentally important for grasping the true nature of the early development of Islam and appears — after the full development of the Science of Hadīth — so new and, indeed, revolutionary, that it is worth our while devoting a little more attention to it in the light of further historical evidence before passing on to our treatment of Hadīth.

Abū Yūsuf, in his *al-Radd 'alā Siyar al-Awzā'i*, states the view of Abū Hanīfah that if a person in a non-Muslim territory becomes

a Muslim, leaves his home and joins the Muslims, then in case this territory falls to Muslim arms, the property of this person will not be simply returned to him but will be included in the *māl al-ghanimah*. The Syrian al-Awzā'ī rejects Abū Hanīfah's view, arguing that the Prophet, at the fall of Makkah, had returned the properties of men who had left Makkah and had joined the Muslims in al-Madīnah. According to Abū Yūsuf, al-Awzā'ī said,

The person most worthy of being followed and whose Sunnah is most deserving of being adhered to is the Prophet.

Abū Yūsuf, defending Abū Hanīfah, says that the practice of Muslims has been on Abū Hanīfah's side and that the Prophet's treatment of Makkans was an exception:

So has been the Sunnah and the practice of Islam (although) the Prophet did not do so (at Makkah).

Abū Yūsuf then points out that the "Prophet's Sunnah" with the tribe of Hawāzin had been still different. After their defeat, the Banū Hawāzin came and implored the Prophet for mercy and release of their captives and return of their property. The Prophet gave up his own share of the booty and was followed by others except some clans who refused to give up their share. The Prophet then compensated these clans and all the property and slaves of the Banū Hawāzin were returned.<sup>26</sup>

The first point to be noticed in the above account is al-Awzā'ī's statement: "The person... whose Sunnah is most deserving of being followed is the Prophet." It obviously implies (i) that Sunnah or authoritative precedent can be set by any competent persons, and (ii) that the Sunnah of the Prophet over-arches all such precedents and has priority over them. But the second, equally important point is the use of the term *Sunnah* by Abū Yūsuf in the above account. Abū Yūsuf first distinguishes between the Sunnah with regard to the point under discussion i.e., the practice accepted by the Muslims on the one hand, and the Prophet's special action in the case of the fall of Makkah on the other. This action of the Prophet is regarded as an

exception by Abū Yūsuf and, therefore, does not constitute *Sunnah* for him; for al-Awzā'ī, on the other hand, it does constitute *Sunnah*. Thus, we see how through different interpretations, contrary conclusions are arrived at by these two legists. But also of great interest for us is the use of the term *Sunnah* by Abū Yūsuf in his second statement where he speaks of the "*Sunnah of the Prophet*" with regard to the Banū Hawāzin. This case too Abū Yusuf regards as some kind of exception to the *Sunnah*; but the exception to the *Sunnah* is also termed *Sunnah*. The most obvious inference from this must be that *when the situation so demands, the exception to the rule must be applied as a rule*. What a contrast this freedom of interpretation of the Prophetic *Sunnah* — in order to formulate the concrete *Sunnah* in sense (ii) i.e., the actual practice of the Community — presents to the rigid and inflexible doctrine of *Sunnah* inculcated by later legists. Here a freely flowing situational treatment of the Prophetic activity, there a once-and-for-all positing of immobile rules; here a ceaseless search for what the Prophet intended to achieve, there a rigid system, definite and defined, cast like a hard shell.

Abū Hanīfah considers undesirable the selling and buying of slaves captured in the enemy territory before they are brought to the land of the Muslims. On this al-Awzā'ī comments,

The Muslims have always been buying and selling war-captives in the *Dār al-Harb*. No two (Muslims) have ever disagreed upon this point until the murder of (the Caliph) al-Wafīd.

Abū Yūsuf comments,

Judgment regarding what is lawful and what is unlawful cannot be based upon such statements as 'People have always been practising such-and-such.' For, much of what people have always been practising is unlawful and should not be practised... The basis (of judgment) should be the *Sunnah* of the Prophet, or of the early generations (*salaḥ*), i.e. the Companions of the Prophet and men who have an understanding of the law.<sup>27</sup>

Again, criticising the Sunnah-concept of the Hījāzī lawyers, Abū Yūsuf writes,

The lawyers of Hījāz give a decision and when they are asked for the authority, they reply, 'This is the established Sunnah.' In all probability, this Sunnah is (the result of) some decision given by a market tax-collector ('*āmil al-sūq*) or a tax-collector in an outlying district.<sup>28</sup>

Certain points clearly emerge from these discussions and arguments and counter-arguments. First, the Sunnah-concept as used by early lawyers, including al-Awzā'ī, although it ideally goes back undoubtedly to the Prophetic Model, is nevertheless, in its actual *materieux*, inclusive of the practice of the Community. Indeed, al-Awzā'ī constantly speaks of the 'practice of the Muslims,' 'of the political (and military) leaders of the Muslims (*a'immat al-muslimin*)' and 'of the consonance of the learned as synonymous terms just as Mālik talks of the practice of al-Madīnah. It is absolutely clear that we are here face to face with the living practice of the early generations of the Muslims. It is also quite obvious that this Sunnah — which we called Sunnah in sense (ii) in part A and which may be called the "living Sunnah" — is identical with the *Ijmā'* of the Community and includes the *Ijtihād* of the '*ulamā'* and of the political authorities in their day-to-day administration.

The second important point that emerges from this picture is that although the "living Sunnah" is still an on-going process — thanks to *Ijtihād* and *Ijmā'* — there is at the same time noticeable, by the middle of the second century, a development in the theoretical frame-work of the *Fiqh*, a development which is clearly visible in the statements of Abū Yūsuf and which began to become conscious first in Iraq. This development reflects a critical attitude towards the living Sunnah and contends that not any and every decision by a judge or a political leader may be regarded as part of the Sunnah and that only those well-versed in law and possessed of a high degree of intelligence may be allowed to extend the living Sunnah. The idea of the living Sunnah is certainly not denied but a firm and sure methodology is sought to base this living Sunnah upon it.

## 2. Early development of the Hadīth

That Hadīth from the Prophet must have existed from the very beginning of Islam, is a fact which may not reasonably be doubted. Indeed, during the life-time of the Prophet, it was perfectly natural for Muslims to talk about what the Prophet did or said, especially in a public capacity. The Arabs, who memorized and handed down poetry of their poets, sayings of their soothsayers and statements of their judges and tribal leaders, cannot be expected to fail to notice and narrate the deeds and sayings of one whom they acknowledged as the Prophet of God. Rejection of this natural phenomenon is tantamount to a grave irrationality, a sin against history. Their new Sunnah — the Sunnah of the Prophet — was much too important (an importance so emphatically enshrined in the Qur'an itself) to be either ignored or neglected, as we sought to establish in part A. This fact juts out like a restive rock in the religious history of Islam, reducing any religious or historical attempt to deny it to a ridiculous frivolity: the Sunnah of the Community is based upon and has its source in the Sunnah of the Prophet.

But the Hadīth, in the Prophet's own time, was largely an informal affair, for the only need for which it would be used was the guidance in the actual practice of the Muslims and this need was fulfilled by the Prophet himself. After his death, the Hadīth seems to have attained a semi-formal status for it was natural for the emerging generation to enquire about the Prophet. There is no evidence, however, that the Hadīth was compiled in any form even at this stage. The reason, again, seems to be this, viz., that whatever Hadīth existed — as the carrier of the Prophetic Sunnah — existed for *practical* purposes i.e., as something which could generate and be elaborated into the practice of the Community. For this reason, it was interpreted by the rulers and the judges freely according to the situation at hand and something was produced in course of time which we have described as the "living Sunnah." But when, by the third and fourth quarters of the first century, the living Sunnah had expanded vastly in different regions of the Muslim Empire through this process of interpretation in *the interests of actual practice*, and

difference in law and legal practice widened, the *Hadīth* began to develop into a formal discipline.

It appears that the activity of the *Hadīth*-transmitters was largely independent of and, in cases, developed even in opposition to the practice of the lawyers and judges. Whereas the lawyers based their legal work on the living *Sunnah* and interpreted their materials freely through their personal judgment in order to elaborate law, the *Hadīth*-transmitters saw their task as consisting of *reporting*, with the purpose of promoting legal fixity and permanence. Although the exact relationship between the lawyers and the transmitters of the *Hadīth* in the earliest period is obscure for lack of sufficient materials, this much seems certain that these two represented in general the two terms of a tension between legal growth and legal permanence: the one interested in creating legal materials, the other seeking a neat methodology or a framework that would endow the legal materials with stability and consistency. It is also quite certain that in the early stages the majority of the *Hadīth* did not go back to the Prophet, due to the natural paucity of the Prophetic *Hadīth*, but to later generations. Certainly, in the extant works of the second century, most of the legal and even moral traditions are not from the Prophet but are traced back to the Companions, the 'Successors' and to the third generation. But as time went on, the *Hadīth* movement, as though through an inner necessity imposed by its very purpose, tended to project the *Hadīth* backwards to its most natural anchoring-point, the person of the Prophet. The early legal schools, whose basis was the living and expanding *Sunnah* rather than a body of fixed opinion attributed to the Prophet, naturally resisted this development. We have briefly outlined the role of al-Shāfi'ī in this process (see part A). Al-Shāfi'ī constantly accuses the lawyers of "not transmitting the *Hadīth*" and of not making use in law, "of the little (*Hadīth*) you transmit."<sup>29</sup> Such criticisms are made by Al-Shāfi'ī especially against the *Hijāzīs* but are equally turned against the *Iraqīs*.

By the middle of the second century, the *Hadīth*-movement had become fairly advanced and although most *Hadīth* was still attributed to persons other than the Prophet — the Companions and especially



the generations after the Companions — nevertheless a part of legal opinion and dogmatic views of the early Muslims had begun to be projected back to the Prophet. We shall produce detailed evidence for this statement presently. But still, the Ḥadīth was interpreted and treated with great freedom. In part A, we adduced evidence from Mālik who often upholds the practice of al-Madīnah against the Ḥadīth and often bases his interpretations on his own opinion (*ra'y*). In the first section of this part, we have seen how situationally Abū Yūsuf interprets the Ḥadīth produced by al-Awzā'ī as an argument. Abū Yūsuf's works are full of instances of this kind. We have also seen above how Abū Yūsuf regards the expert lawyers as elaborators of the Prophetic Sunnah and creators of the living Sunnah. He rejects 'lonely' Ḥadīth by which he does not mean, as was done later, a Ḥadīth which has only one chain of narrators but a Ḥadīth which stands alone as a kind of exception to the general Sunnah. For instance, Abū Hanīfah holds that a person who provides two horses for the *Jihād* is entitled to draw booty-share for only one. Al-Awzā'ī, on the other hand, allows both horses to claim shares and bases himself both on Ḥadīth and practice, saying, "This is a Ḥadīth well-known to scholars and on which the political leaders have acted."<sup>30</sup> Presumably, this was the administrative practice in Syria. Abū Yūsuf comments,

No tradition has come down to us from the Prophet or anyone of his Companions about allowing shares to both horses except one. But one Ḥadīth we regard as being solitary and do not consider it valid. As for al-Awzā'ī's statement that this has been the practice of the political leaders and the view of scholars, this is just like the people of Hijāz who keep asserting: 'This is the established Sunnah.' This cannot be accepted as authoritative from ignorant people. Which political leader has practised it, and which scholar has accepted it?...<sup>31</sup>

In the same work, Abū Yūsuf issues a general warning against uncritical acceptance of Ḥadīth:

Ḥadīth multiplies so much so that some Ḥadīths which are traced back through chains of transmission (*yukharraju*) are not well-known to

legal experts, nor do they conform to the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Beware of solitary Hadīths and keep close to the "collective spirit (*al-jamā'ah*)" of Hadīth.<sup>32</sup>

He adds,

Therefore, make the Qur'an and the well-known Sunnah your guide and follow it.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, Abū Yūsuf establishes as the criterion of the "collective nature or spirit" of Hadīth the well-known Sunnah. (The term 'collectivity' or 'collective nature' is highly significant and we shall show in the fourth section of this part that it is intimately connected with the term *Sunnah* and is then used to designate the majority or the 'collectivity' of Muslims — the *Ahl al-Sunnah wa'l-Jamā'ah*). Abū Yūsuf also quotes several Hadīths from the Prophet himself and from his Companions warning against Hadīth and even in rejection of it.<sup>34</sup> This *anti-Hadīth* Hadīth must be, strictly historically speaking, a result of the phenomenon of Hadīth itself which is the logical condition for its emergence. But it is, indeed, highly probable that the *anti-Hadīth* Hadīth is prior to *pro-Hadīth* Hadīth. This lies in the very nature of the Hadīth-process. Besides, whereas we find the former in Abū Yūsuf, the latter does not seem to occur until later, and even al-Shāfi'ī, the great protagonist of Hadīth, produces two or three Hadīths only (which we shall discuss later) and bases his arguments for the acceptance of Hadīth, for the most part, on other materials — Qur'anic and historical. But although Abū Yūsuf quotes several Hadīths from the Prophet about the forgery of Hadīth, he still does not know the famous Hadīth which later found a prominent place in the *Sihāh*-works and which says,

He who deliberately reports lies about me, shall prepare his seat in the Fire.

This Hadīth was sought to be countered by another one which makes the Prophet say,

Whatever there be of good saying, you can take me to have said it.

Nevertheless, despite Abū Yūsuf's cautions against the "multiplication of Ḥadīth", a good deal of Ḥadīth had been, by his time, obviously projected back. For example, in his *Kitāb al-Āthār* a tradition is attributed once to 'Ā'ishah, wife of the Prophet, and again to the Companion Ibn Mas'ūd saying,

Evil [or trouble (*al-balā'*)] is a concomitant of dialectical theology (*al-kalām*).<sup>35</sup>

Another Ḥadīth attributes a deterministic doctrine of dogmatic theology to the Prophet himself. The Companion Surāqah b. Mālik asks the Prophet,

Tell us about this Faith of ours as though we were created for it (right) on the hour: Are we working for something which has been already determined by Divine Decree and the Pen has become dry over it, or shall we work for something (of) which (the issue) shall be decided in the future? The Prophet answered, "Rather for something which has been decided by the Divine Decree and over which the Pen has run dry." "What is, then, our action about? O Prophet of God!" asked Surāqah, and the Prophet replied, "Work on! for every person, that has been made easy what he has been created for." The Prophet then recited the words of the Qur'an, "As for him who gives generously, fears (God) and approves of good things, We make good easy for him."<sup>36</sup>

We shall explain in the fourth section, while discussing the emergence of the Muslim orthodoxy, the nature and the role of the free-will-determinism controversy of which such Ḥadīth as the one quoted here is a result. The verse of the Qur'an quoted in this Ḥadīth is in unconcealed contradiction with the determinism preached in the Ḥadīth.

There is also a definite though rudimentary form of eschatological Ḥadīth implying the Second Advent of Jesus, although it is attributed not to the Prophet but to 'Abd al-A'lā described either as a *qādī* or as a story-teller (*qāss*) — the latter being most probably

correct. An instance of the political Ḥadīth is the following:

A man came to 'Alī and said, "I have never seen anyone better than you." 'Alī asked, "Did you see the Prophet?", whereupon the man replied "No." "Did you see Abū Bakr and 'Umar?" enquired 'Alī and received a negative reply. "If you had told me that you had seen the Prophet," exclaimed 'Alī, "I would have executed you; and if you had said that you had known Abū Bakr and 'Umar, I would have administered dire punishment to you."<sup>37</sup>

A moral-legal Ḥadīth runs as follows: The Prophet said to Abū Dharr:

O Abū Dharr! public office (*al-imrah* or *al-imārah*) is a trust which on the day of Judgement shall turn into disgrace and repentance except for those who acquire such office properly and then fulfil the obligation (that it lays upon them).

Abū Yūsuf's fellow-legist, Muḥammad al-Shaybānī says after narrating the same Ḥadīth that the Prophet added, "And how can he possibly do that, O Abū Dharr?"<sup>38</sup>

### 3. The Ḥadīth movement

The Ḥadīth-materials continued to increase during the second century and the period represented above constitutes a transition period in the development of both the literature and the status of the Prophetic Ḥadīth. Al-Awzā'ī regards the Ḥadīth of the Prophet as being endowed with fundamental obligatoriness but the Sunnah or living practice is of the same status with him. His appeals to the practice of the Community or its leaders are to judge from the extant materials, the most regular feature of his legal argumentation. Mālik adduces Ḥadīth (not necessarily Prophetic Ḥadīth) to vindicate the Madīnese Sunnah but regards the Sunnah in terms of actual importance, as being superior to the Ḥadīth. As for Abū Yūsuf and al-Shaybānī, very few of whose legal Ḥadīths go back to the Prophet at all, they interpret the Ḥadīth with a freedom whose instances we

have seen above. The Iraqi school recognises the supreme importance of the Prophetic Ḥadīth but the Ḥadīth, according to it, must be situationally interpreted in order that law may be deduced from it. There is only one point in his *al-Radd 'alā Siyar al-Awzā'ī* on which Abū Yūsuf has recanted from Abū Ḥanīfah's position to that of al-Awzā'ī on the basis of Ḥadīth — although he could have easily interpreted that Ḥadīth if he had wished to. The point under discussion is the share of booty to be allotted to a Muslim for his horse for taking part in *Jihād* apart from his own share. It seems that a horse's share was double the share of a human being and the practice probably originated with the Prophet who wanted to encourage the breeding of horses for war in view of the paucity of riding animals suitable for war in early Islam. Indeed, there is evidence that the Prophet was anxious over this matter in the early stages of the Muslims' struggle against the pagan Arabs. Abū Ḥanīfah thought it improper that an animal should be treated preferentially in relation to a man,<sup>39</sup> and he had also a precedent of 'Umar who approved of a booty distribution in Syria where one share was given to each man and also one share for every horse.<sup>40</sup> We do not know what the practice at that time was and it is very likely that the practice differed in different regions. It is obvious that the chief determinant in this issue should be the relative scarcity or otherwise of the horses, the type of horse, the cost involved in maintaining a war-horse etc. But al-Awzā'ī states categorically that not only had the Prophet given to a horse twice the share of a soldier but that the "Muslims follow this until today." Abū Yūsuf, who otherwise liberally interprets the Prophetic and other precedents throughout, gives up his master's view on the ground that al-Awzā'ī's position is supported by a tradition from the Prophet and from other Companions.<sup>41</sup>

This case is obviously a clear indication of the increasing power of the Ḥadīth over against the living Sunnah whose very life-blood was free and progressive interpretation. It was against this background that al-Shāfi'ī, the "Champion of Ḥadīth", carried out his successful campaign to substitute the Ḥadīth for the living Sunnah as briefly described in part A. We shall illustrate al-Shāfi'ī's attitude

to the Hadīth and free interpretation by two examples which shall indicate the nature of the change and the power of the new trend that had set in the legal thought of Islam. There was a difference of opinion among the jurists about the extent of the sternness of policy towards a non-Muslim people in state of war. Abū Hanīfah advocated a consistently stern policy on general grounds of strategy: such questions are considered as to whether enemy livestock and trees should be destroyed; whether anything should be exported to the enemy territory, especially goods of a strategic character; whether the enemy, in case they shield themselves, say, with Muslim children, should be shot at; whether war captives should be allowed to be redeemed by the enemy or not; whether Muslim soldiers who find themselves without weapons during a battle may take such weapons from the public reserves (without permission, apparently).<sup>42</sup> On all these matters Abū Hanīfah recommends alternatives conducive to a successful issue in favour of Muslims and making for Muslim strength. The net result is an uncompromisingly stern policy. The only guiding principles of Abū Hanīfah seem to be those based on pure war-strategy. On the first of the above-mentioned questions, where Abū Hanīfah seeks to support himself by a Qur'anic verse, al-Awzā'ī who opposes Abū Hanīfah on all these points, adduces no Prophetic Hadīth but relies on injunctions reported to have been given by Abū Bakr to the troops, viz., that they should not destroy trees or animals. Abū Yūsuf, who takes the side of his master on all these issues and taunts al-Awzā'ī more than once with ignoring the interests of the Muslims,<sup>43</sup> controverts the story of Abū Bakr's alleged instructions and seeks to support his view from the incident of the Muslim treatment of the Banū Qurayzah.

Al-Shāfi'ī is questioned on the same point<sup>44</sup> by a Madīnese who says that according to his school enemy property should be spared from destruction and refers to the above-mentioned injunctions of Abū Bakr. Al-Shāfi'ī declares himself unequivocally in favour of destroying the enemy property, to the exclusion of the animals. He bases himself on the historical Hadīth that the Prophet carried out wholesale destruction when the Muslims attacked Banū Naḍir, Khaybar and al-Tā'if and asserts that this is the Sunnah of the

Prophet.<sup>45</sup> Now, the fact is that with regard to the Jews of Banū Nadīr and Khaybar, the Prophet had taken specially stern measures and historical facts render the conclusion inescapable that the past behaviour of the Jews was responsible for this. Indeed, it is highly probable that the Prophet wanted to drive the Jews out of Arabia. (This was later categorically stated in Hadīth form which is, however, historically unacceptable for banishing of Jews is attributed by Hadīth to 'Umar also). As for al-Tā'if, it was the last post of resistance of the pagan Arabs and was stubbornly holding out even after the fall of Makkah. This is the reason why the Prophet took specially strong measures against it and is even said to have bombarded it with a catapult. It is highly illuminating to see that while Abū Hanīfah and al-Shāfi'ī hold the same position, they do so for very different reasons. Whereas Abū Hanīfah's real grounds are commonsense war-strategy for which he seeks support in the Qur'an, al-Shāfi'ī bases himself on literal Hadīth reports without taking the situational context into account. For al-Awzā'ī, like the Madinese, the practice of the Muslims is authoritatively indicative of the Prophetic Sunnah and they adduce no arguments from the Prophet's campaigns against the Banū Nadīr, Banū Qurayzah, Khaybar or al-Tā'if. On the question of killing the animals, however, al-Shāfi'ī takes up a position similar to that of al-Awzā'ī but again for very different reasons. Whereas the latter appeals to Abū Bakr's instructions, al-Shāfi'ī has come to base himself on a Hadīth generally forbidding the killing of animals except for food — a Hadīth which, it is noteworthy, was not known to al-Awzā'ī or to Abū Yūsuf.

A second instance of this new trend represented by al-Shāfi'ī may be seen in the case of the institution of the *waliy* or guardian in marriage. The institution of the *waliy* must have been older than Islam and there are also reports from the Prophet and others about its importance. According to one report, a guardian is necessary only for a first marriage and a remarrying woman can dispense with it, while according to another no marriage is valid without a *waliy*. 'Umar is said to have forbidden women from marrying without the permission of their guardian, or an elder statesman of their family or

the state. A Madīnese tells al-Shāfi'ī that he and his colleagues uphold the *walīy* institution for noble-born women but do not regard it necessary in the case of low-born ones. The idea behind this attitude seems to be that the *walīy* endows the marriage with a formal dignity which is not thought necessary in the case of a low-born woman. Al-Shāfi'ī says to him,

What would you think if someone were to tell you that he will not permit the marriage of a low-born woman without a guardian for she is more liable to enter into a spurious marriage and to fall into evil than a noble-born one who has a sense of honour of her noble origin... Would such a person not be nearer the truth than you? Your opinion is too erroneous to need any more refutation than just to be stated.<sup>46</sup>

Al-Shāfi'ī maintains that the Ḥadīth must be accepted, no distinctions made and no questions raised about it. It will be seen that al-Shāfi'ī's interpretation of the *walīy* institution is not so much in terms of dignity and honour but in those of protecting the woman from evil and a public guarantee of genuine marriage. But although al-Shāfi'ī has correctly analyzed the value (*'illat al-hukm*), he, in fact, warns against this kind of rational activity and recommends a literal acceptance of Ḥadīth.

The Ḥadīth-movement, which represents the new change in the religious structure of Islam as a discipline and whose mile-stone is al-Shāfi'ī's activity in law and legal Ḥadīth, demanded by its very nature that Ḥadīth should expand and that ever new Ḥadīth should continue to come into existence in new situations to face novel problems — social, moral, religious etc. It is, of course, beyond the scope of this article to treat, in an exhaustive manner, all the fields wherein and points of view wherefrom ever new Ḥadīth came into being but the following shall serve as illustrations of both the nature and the scope of Ḥadīth-formation. It is well-known and admitted by the classical traditionists themselves that moral maxims and edifying statements and aphorisms may be attributed to the Prophet irrespective of whether this attribution is strictly historical or not. It was legal and dogmatic Ḥadīth i.e. that concerning belief and practice which must, "strictly speaking", belong to the Prophet.



First, it may, of course be doubted, once the principle of non-historicity is introduced at some level, whether this principle can stand confined to that level. If one thinks that a certain maxim contains a moral truth and may, therefore, be attributed to the Prophet, why should not a legal dictum which, according to someone, embodies a moral value → for law is nothing but a particular embodiment of moral principles — likewise be attributed to the Prophet? The majority of the contents of the Hadīth-corpus is, in fact, nothing but the Sunnah-*Ijtihād* of the first generations of Muslims, an *ijtihad* which had its source in individual opinion but which in course of time and after tremendous struggles and conflicts against heresies and extreme sectarian opinion received the sanction of *Ijmā'* i.e. the adherence of the majority of the community. In other words, the earlier living Sunnah was reflected in the mirror of the Hadīth with the necessary addition of chains of narrators. There is, however, one major difference: whereas Sunnah was largely and primarily a practical phenomenon, geared as it was to *behavioral* norms, Hadīth became the vehicle not only of legal norms but of religious beliefs and principles as well. We present here some examples.

We have noticed above the warnings against Hadīth by Abū Yūsuf. Some of these warnings are attributed to the Prophet himself and we have already remarked that it is highly probable that anti-Hadīth traditions originated before the pro-Hadīth traditions. The earliest extant account supporting Hadīth by a Hadīth is that of al-Shāfi'ī. He quotes the following tradition:

The Prophet said, 'May God make that man prosperous who hears my words, preserves them carefully in memory and then transmits them. For, there is many a bearer of wisdom who cannot understand it himself (but can only transmit it). And many a transmitter of wisdom transmits it to someone who can understand it better. There are three things with regard to which the heart of a Muslim is never stingy: working sincerely for God, active good-will for the Muslims and adhering to their majority for their mission (*da'wah*) will render them secure.<sup>47</sup>

Another tradition quoted by him repeatedly is that the Prophet said,

Let me not find anyone of you reclining on his seat and, when a command comes from me commanding something, or forbidding something, saying, 'I do not know (this); I follow that which I find in the Book of God.'<sup>48</sup>

Lastly, there is the tradition according to which the Prophet said,

There is no harm in relating traditions from the Banū Isrā'īl; and relate traditions (also) from me but do not attribute traditions to me falsely.<sup>49</sup>

The first of the above-mentioned three Hadīths is also adduced by al-Shāfi'ī as an argument for *Ijmā'* which we shall discuss below. Here we begin by enunciating a general principle viz. *that a Hadīth which involves a prediction, directly or indirectly, cannot, on strict historical grounds, be accepted as genuinely emanating from the Prophet and must be referred to the relevant period of later history.* We do not reject all predictions but only those which are fairly specific. This principle has been accepted by most classical traditionists themselves but has never been applied by them with the full rigour of strict historicity. While they reject absolutely specific predictions viz. those which claim to indicate a specific day or date or place, they swallow without qualms predictions about the rise of Muslim theological and political groups and parties. We Muslims must decide whether, in face of strict historical evidence, we can accept and go on accepting predictive Hadīth and, if so, how far. There is a type of prediction contained e.g. in the Qur'anic verse about the relative war-fortunes of the Persians and the Romans (Qur'an, 30:1-3). This kind of prediction is absolutely rational for while even ordinary human wisdom, with an insight into history, can successfully predict on such points as wars, economic slumps etc., how much more infallibly can the Divine Wisdom. But we shall show that the predictions which Hadīth involves directly or indirectly are not of this type. Indeed, we shall also show in the next section that the basic function of Hadīth was not so much history-writing but

history-making and that contemporary phenomena were projected back in the form of Hadīth in order to succeed in moulding the Community on a certain spiritual, political and social pattern. We must emphasize again that it is not against the predictive quality of the Prophet, arising out of an insight into the workings of historic forces that we argue. On the contrary, we believe that the very greatness of the Prophet lies in the fact that, having a unique insight into the forces of history, he pressed them into the service of a Divinely inspired moral pattern. But there is a world of difference between this historic judgment and soothsaying about e.g. the false Prophet Musaylimah and the rise of the Mu'tazilah, Khawārij, Shi'ah etc.

By predictive Hadīth we do not mean only such Hadīth as has the predictive form but also that which involves a prediction. For example, the Hadīth, "The Qadarīs (i.e. those who uphold the freedom of the human will) are the Magians of this Community," although not directly predictive, involves a prediction. For, it presupposes a technical consciousness of the philosophical problem of freedom such as could develop only with the rise of dogmatic schisms. Now, in the light of our principle, all the three Hadīths cited above from al-Shāfi'ī supporting the phenomenon of Hadīth itself, are, historically speaking, extremely dubious. Take the first one. Besides the obvious fact that for the Prophet to say what the first part of this Hadīth attributes to him is to insult his own Companions by calling them unintelligent, the Hadīth could only arise at a time when the legal acumen of the Muslims flared up and brilliant schools of legal opinion developed all over the then Muslim world from Iraq to Egypt. Further, it conjures up a picture of the Prophet and his Companions which is entirely artificial: the Prophet is portrayed as making speeches and issuing statements, not for the immediate needs of the contemporary Community but for the Community to preserve them word for word, for transmission to later generations who should understand them better! Nor will the second Hadīth bear examination: it presupposes an acceptance of the Qur'an and a *wholesale* rejection of the Sunnah, a complete divorce of the latter from the former which, as we pointed out also in our

last article, cannot be rationally and legitimately attributed to the Companions. How could the Companions, who accepted even the Word of God on the authority of the Prophet, reject that very authority of the Prophet *as a whole* (as distinguished from murmurs in certain quarters about a *particular* decision of the Prophet)? For the Hadīth in question envisages a *total* rejection of the Sunnah in favour of the Qur'an. It obviously arose in a later situation when the Hadīth-movement had set in and claimed to be the unique vehicle (at the expense of the living Sunnah) of expressing the Prophetic Sunnah; and its credentials to do so were questioned both by the *Ahl al-Kalām* and the earlier schools of law. Thus, this Hadīth turns out to be blatantly predictive. As for al-Shāfi'ī's third Hadīth, its case is no better:

There is no harm in relating traditions from the Banū Isrā'īl; and relate traditions (also) from me but do not attribute to me traditions falsely.

With certain alterations, this Hadīth has also survived in al-Bukhārī's *Sahīh*. But it is a historical fact that Judeo-Christian religious lore had begun to find its way into Islam at a very early date chiefly through the activity of popular preachers (*qussās*) who wanted to make their sermons as effective as possible. This movement was criticized by certain early traditions and sayings. There is, for example, a tradition that 'Umar once advocated the acceptance of certain Jewish traditions but was sternly forbidden by the Prophet to do so.<sup>50</sup> There is also a saying admonishing the Muslims to seek knowledge "not from popular preachers but from the *fuqahā*".<sup>51</sup> These endeavours to stem the tide of what came to be called '*Isrā'īliyyāt*' were then sought to be countered by such Hadīths as the present one.

So much for the Hadīth-basis of Hadīth. Let us now turn to *Ijmā'*. Al-Shāfi'ī has two Hadīths to quote to establish the validity of *Ijmā'*. His predecessors, of course, had the idea of *Ijmā'* but it seems to have been a natural growth. Even Abū Yūsuf and al-Shaybānī who talk of sticking to the traditions and opinions of *al-jamā'ah* and *al-'āmmah*, do not bring in any Hadīth, i.e. a verbal report from the

Prophet to support *Ijmā'*. One Hadīth of al-Shāfi'ī in this connection is identical with the first Hadīth quoted above of which the first part we have already discussed concerning Hadīth. The second part says,

There are three things with regard to which the heart of a Muslim is never stingy: sincere action for God's sake, active good-will for the Muslims and sticking to the majority of the Muslims — for their mission will safeguard them.

Al-Shāfi'ī's second Hadīth runs:

'Umar gave a sermon in al-Jāhiyah (a place in Syria) in which he said: "The Prophet (once) stood among us as I now stand among you and declared, 'Honour my Companions first, then those who follow them and then those who follow these latter. Then (i.e. after these three generations) falsehood will become rampant so that a person will swear without being asked to swear and shall offer to give evidence without being asked to do so. Listen! whosoever wants to be pleased with a spacious residence in Paradise, should (under these circumstances) stick to the majority of the Community. Satan is the companion of the isolated person; if one person (is joined by another and) become two, Satan recedes from them proportionately..."<sup>52</sup>

The fact that earlier jurists, although insisting on *Ijmā'*, do not support it by any Hadīth is itself a fundamentally significant comment on the evolution of the Hadīth-movement. Indeed, how much the situation had changed in this regard by the time of al-Shāfi'ī can be tellingly illustrated by one example. Abū Yūsuf, while warning against the flood of Hadīth says that the Prophet once said,

Hadīth in my name will spread; so what comes to you in my name and agrees with the Qur'an, take it as coming from me while what comes to you in my name but is in conflict with the Qur'an cannot be from me.<sup>53</sup>

As we pointed out earlier in this section, this type of *anti-Hadīth* Hadīth cannot be regarded as genuine. It represents, rather, a genuine effort not only on the part of the Mu'tazilah but on that of

orthodox jurists to curb the Hadīth movement. But the Hadīth-movement had become so strong only a few decades later that this particular Hadīth regarded by Abū Yūsuf as apparently genuine, was rejected by al-Shāfi'ī as absolutely unreliable.<sup>54</sup>

But what about the two Hadīths quoted by al-Shāfi'ī to give a theoretical basis for *Ijmā'*? The first of these two Hadīths we have already found reason to declare unhistorical. Further, we shall show that it is part of a massive campaign carried out from the second century onwards to preserve the unitary fabric of the Community and to crystallize a middle-of-the-road orthodox majority i.e. a majority which by being both a majority and middle-of-the-road would be deserving of the designation 'orthodoxy'. As for the second Hadīth quoted by al-Shāfi'ī, it is so manifestly predictive that this hardly needs to be pointed out. This Hadīth gives the first formal hint that the first three generations — the Companions, their Successors and the Successors of the Successors — are to be regarded as the Fathers of the Islamic doctrine and practice and their teachings as the permanent basis for the religious structure of the Community. It is a point of great importance and interest to note that it is after approximately these three generations that the "living Sunnah" of these very generations starts getting canonized in the form of the Hadīth.

Al-Shāfi'ī, immediately before quoting the Hadīth on *Ijmā'*, while defending *Ijmā'* also states,

We know (i.e. it is our conviction) that the majority ('*āmmah*) of them (i.e. Muslims) will not, God willing, agree on an error.

After al-Shāfi'ī, when Hadīth multiplies still further, this statement becomes a Hadīth and is attributed to the Prophet in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Tirmidhī by the change of the word *khata'* into *dalālah* and in the later centuries becomes very famous. Other formulations of this idea also come into existence such as the Hadīth, "God's hand is on the majority. (*al-jamā'ah*)"<sup>55</sup> etc. But, as we said just now, the *Ijmā'*-Hadīth is a part of a campaign to crystallize a middle-of-the-road orthodoxy, to the consideration of which we must now turn.

#### 4. The Hadīth and the Orthodox (*al-Sunnah wa'l-Jamā'ah*)

A most important feature of the religious history of Islam, neglect or underestimation of which must result in a total misunderstanding of that history, is the fact that from the very moment that political, theological and legal differences threatened the integrity of the Community, the idea to preserve its unity asserted itself. The doctrine that this unity will be some kind of a synthesis or the *via media* (*al-Sunnah*) is a necessary corollary of the same idea. Hence, the terms *al-sunnah wa'l-jamā'ah*, as a single phrase, are not merely juxtaposed but are held to be correlates. Indeed, the most basic function of the Muslim 'orthodoxy' has been, since the very inception of the idea, not to dictate or define religious truth but to consolidate and formulate it; neither to be an intermediary between God and man nor to be a warring group among groups but to stabilize and keep balance. The agents in this great drama of producing the structure of the orthodoxy are precisely the *Ahl al-Hadīth*.

The political wars, and, in their wake, theological and dogmatic controversies, gave rise to a specially prominent type of predictive Hadīth known as the 'Hadīth about civil wars' (*Hadīth al-Fitan*). Its clear purpose was to steer a middle course especially between the Khārijī and Shi'ī political and theological extremes. To justify Hadīth about civil wars, certain over-arching Hadīths were circulated such as the following from the Companion Hudhayfah who said,

The Prophet once stood among us (to address us) in such a manner that he left nothing (important) that was to happen until the Hour of Judgment but that his address comprehended it. Those who remember it, remember it and there are those who have forgotten it... There are certain things in this address which I have forgotten but when I am confronted with them I remember them just as a person (vaguely) remembers the face of an absent person but when he sees him again he recognizes him.

This Hadīth is quoted by both al-Bukhārī and Muslim.<sup>56</sup> According to Abū Dāwud, Hudhayfah said that the Prophet had identified every

leader of a political dissension who had three hundred or more followers, by his name, his father's name and tribe.<sup>57</sup> A typical *Fitnah*-Hadīth is the following one from Muslim and al-Bukhārī allegedly reported again, by Hudhayfah:

People used to ask the Prophet about good while I used to ask him about evil out of fear lest it should overtake me. So I said, 'O Prophet of God! We have been previously in ignorance and evil and then God brought us this good (through you); will there be evil again after the present good?' 'Yes', said the Prophet. 'And will good return once again after that evil?' I asked. The Prophet said, 'Yes, but there will be a mixture of corruption in it.' 'What will be its corruption?' I asked. The Prophet replied, 'Some people shall follow other than my Sunnah and shall lead people not whither I lead. Some of their deeds will be good, others bad.' I asked, 'Will there be, after this (mixed) good, again evil?' He said, 'Yes, propagandists standing at the gates of Hell; whoever listens to them, they will throw him into it.' 'Describe them for us, O Prophet of God!' I requested. The Prophet said, 'They are from our own race, speaking the very same tongue.' 'What is your command for me in case I find myself in such a situation?' I asked. The Prophet said, 'Stick to the majority-party of the Muslims and to their political leader.' 'But if they have no majority-party nor a political leader?' I enquired. The Prophet replied, 'Then forsake all the factions, even if you have to cling to the root of a tree until death overtakes you in this condition.'<sup>58</sup>

According to another version in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim the Prophet said,

After me shall come political leaders who will not be guided by my guidance and will not follow my Sunnah, and among them shall arise people whose hearts shall be the hearts of devils in the physical frames of humans." Hudhayfah says he asked, "What shall I do, O Prophet of God! if I find myself in such a situation?" Thereupon the Prophet answered, "Listen and obey the political leader. And should he even strike your back and wrest your property, you should but listen and obey."<sup>59</sup>

Neither of these two Hadīths is, of course, acceptable as a



genuine Prophetic sayings any more than the preceding Ḥadīth (which is designed to be a sheet-anchor for all predictive Ḥadīth). What they jointly teach is to keep with the majority of the Muslims and obey the political leadership at any cost — except possibly infidelity. Thus, we see that the *Ijmā'*-Ḥadīth is grounded in a dire political necessity. And the dictum that one should obey even an unjust ruler is a counsel of wisdom dictated also by political needs arising out of incessant civil wars; it hearkens especially to those incurable professional rebels, the Khārijites. And a peculiarly anti-Khārijī Ḥadīth is the following which, over against Khārijī rebellionism, teaches absolute passivity and isolationism, viz. that the Prophet said,

There shall be civil wars wherein a sit-at-home will be better than a standing person; and a standing person shall be better than one who walks; and one who walks will be better than one who runs...<sup>60</sup>

This Ḥadīth does nothing but to seek to counteract Khārijī activism and zest for political life. In fact, sometimes the isolationist Ḥadīth has gone so far as to annul the *Ijmā'*-doctrine and to teach crass individualism. Thus, the Prophet is reported to have advised 'Abdullāh b. 'Amr b. al-'Ās,

Stick to your home and control your tongue; take what you recognize as good and leave what you cannot recognize as good; and mind your own business and have nothing to do with the affairs of the 'public'.<sup>61</sup>

It is noteworthy that the word which we have rendered as 'public' is *al-'āmmah* which in early literature is an equivalent of *al-jamā'ah* as we shall presently explain.

Not, however, all Sunni Ḥadīth is anti-Khārijite. There is, for example, a Ḥadīth quoted by Ibn Hanbal, Abū Dāwūd, al-Tirmidhī and Ibn Mājah in which a political doctrine has been incorporated which is originally unmistakably Khārijī. According to this Ḥadīth, the Prophet said,

My (last) advice to you is to fear God and to render absolute

obedience (to the political leader) even if he be a black slave. Those of you who survive me shall see great differences (among Muslims); so stick to my Sunnah and that of the rightly-guided and divinely-led Caliphs.<sup>62</sup>

In this Ḥadīth, the element of absolute obedience is anti-Khārijite but the extension of rulership to a "black slave" is so unmistakably Khārijī that it hits the eye. For the Sunnis had upheld that "rulers are from the Quraysh," while the Shi'ah had demanded that rulership must belong to a descendant of the House of 'Alī. The Khārijites alone had extended the privilege of possible political leadership of the Community to every Muslim — "even though he be a black slave," the only condition being a man's fitness for the office. This phenomenon viz. that the *Ahl al-Sunnah wa'l-Jamā'ah* have included in their doctrine certain elements from the right and certain others from the left wing, is not confined to this Ḥadīth alone which has been given here only for illustration. *This policy of synthesis and mediation is, indeed, of the essence of the Ahl al-Sunnah.*

But the idea of the "middle-path-majority", although certainly in its earliest phase born of political necessity, was bound to be applied in a theological-legal sense also as the political factions tended to create for themselves a theological-moral-legal basis. We have pointed, in the last article, to Abū Ḥanīfah's description of himself as one of "*Ahl al-'adl wa'l-Sunnah*" (i.e. people of balance and the middle path) in the context of a theological controversy. [In this connection, one should also recall such terms as "*al-jamā'ah min al-Ḥadīth*" (i.e. the Ḥadīth recognized by the majority or the collective nature of Ḥadīth) and "*al-Sunnah al-ma'rūfah*" used frequently by Abū Yūsuf to distinguish these from the 'peripheral' and 'obscure' opinion]. This controversy, indeed, was the most acute, not only because it was the first general moral-theological controversy in Islam but also because due to its very nature, it threatened the fabric of the Muslim Community most seriously. The controversy was precisely this: What is the definition of a *Mu'min* or a Muslim and can a man continue to be regarded as a Muslim even if he commits a grave moral error? The Khārijites not only declared such a person as a *Kāfir* but they attributed *Kufr* also to

those who did not declare such a person as a *Kāfir*, and further declared the necessity of *Jihād* against them. Against this alarming challenge the need was felt of a catholic definition of Islam which should be acceptable to the 'majority'. Would not such a definition necessarily be middle-of-the-road — *and, therefore, correct?* The first reaction to the Khārījī uncompromising fanaticism was Murjī'ism i.e. the doctrine — most probably favoured by the Umayyad state — that a person who professes to be a Muslim should not be declared non-Muslim because of his deeds, and that the state of his inner spirit must be left to God for final judgment. Of course, if the Community was to survive at all some such definition was necessary and a modified Murjī'ism — through making some sort of a distinction between Islam and *Īmān* — came, in course of time, to constitute an essential factor of orthodoxy i.e. the beliefs of the majority of the Community. The following famous Hadīth is a typical Murjī'ite Hadīth and is to be found in both al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

The Companion Abū Dharr relates that the Prophet said, "There is none who confesses that 'there is no god but God' but that he shall enter Paradise." Abū Dharr asked, "Even though he should commit adultery and theft?" "Even though he should commit adultery and theft", replied the Prophet. Abū Dharr repeated the question three times and got the same answer from the Prophet who added with his third affirmation, "Though Abū Dharr's nose should be in the dust" — i.e. despite the wishes of Abū Dharr. We are told that whenever Abū Dharr related this Hadīth, he repeated the phrase (proudly), "Though Abū Dharr's nose should be in the dust."<sup>63</sup>

The same Hadīth is related by Abū Yūsuf in his *Kitāb al-Āthār*, only not from Abū Dharr but from another Companion, Abū'l-Dardā'; and Abū Yūsuf adds that Abū'l-Dardā' used to relate this Hadīth every Friday by the pulpit of the Prophet.<sup>64</sup>

In order partially to redress the moral shock which a sensitive person may experience at being told that people may continue to be good Muslims "even though they should commit adultery and theft," a more compromising and refined view was put forward in a Hadīth

recorded by Abū Dāwūd and al-Tirmidhī viz. that the Prophet said,

Where a person commits adultery, Faith goes out of him and remains above his head like a canopy; but when he passes out of this (state of sinful) act, Faith returns to him.<sup>65</sup>

As a result of this painstaking and heart-searching Hadīth-activity amidst an atmosphere of interminable conflict, the Muslim orthodoxy — the *Ahl al-Sunnah* (i.e. the majority of the Community) finally formulated at the hands of al-Ash'arī and al-Māturīdī and their successors — a catholic definition of Islam which silenced Khārijism and Mu'tazilism and saved the Community from suicide.

The same overall picture emerges when we turn to the problem of the freedom of the human will *versus* Divine determinism — the second big rock (which directly grew out of the first viz. the relationship of faith to behaviour and the definition of a Muslim) that shook the Community during the second and third centuries. But whereas the first challenge came from the Khawārij, the second came from the Mu'tazilah who are, in a sense, the theological inheritors of the Khawārij. The two questions are also allied. For, if a man is free to will and (presumably) to act according to his will, then his actions are a direct index of the state of his inner Faith, and he is responsible for both his willing and acting. But if so, then the original controversy as to who is a Muslim and who is not will be opened again. In other words, Mu'tazilism is bound to resurrect Khārijism. Besides, the Mu'tazilah rationalism appeared to the religious-minded to be a form of gross humanism, an imposition upon God of what a certain number of men regard as truth and justice. Because probably of both these dangers, a vast amount of Hadīth came to be circulated emphasizing Divine determinism at different levels — of intention, motivation and act. We have noted above in the second section a relatively early form of this deterministic Hadīth. But in course of time the Hadīth on this point multiplied. The Prophet is, for instance, reported to have said,

Believers in freedom of the human will are the Magians of this Community. Do not visit them when they fall sick; do not attend their

funerals when they die.<sup>66</sup>

This Hadīth, besides advocating an extreme stand of a total boycott of the Mu'tazilah, involves a series of technical steps in a sophisticated philosophic reasoning such as cannot be attributed to early seventh century Arabia. The suppressed argument is on the following lines. God is Omnipotent. But if there is an omnipotent being, no other being can even be potent, let alone omnipotent. But man, in order to have freedom of will and action, must be potent. Therefore, the admission of human freedom is the admission of two ultimate potencies — God and man, since, if we regard human potency as not being ultimate but only derivative from God, then freedom of the will becomes illusory. In history, Zoroastrianism has admitted two ultimate potencies — Yazdān and Ahriman. Belief in freedom of the human will is, therefore, a form of Zoroastrianism. According to another Hadīth, the Prophet said,

Do not have social intercourse with the believers in the freedom of the will, nor take your cases to them for decision.<sup>67</sup>

A Hadīth contained in Muslim and al-Bukhārī reports from the Prophet,

It is pre-written for the son of Adam as to the exact amount of adultery he should commit. Now, the adultery of the eye is a (lustful) look, the adultery of the tongue is talk; the soul wishes and desires while the sexual organ (only) confirms or belies.<sup>68</sup>

A number of Hadīths state categorically and graphically how God, when He created all the souls in Eternity, destined some to Paradise, others to Hell, and some adding, "I do not care!"<sup>69</sup> The Prophet, in a Hadīth to be found in al-Bukhārī and Muslim says,

(When the embryo is four months old), God sends an angel with four Decrees which he writes down viz. its actions, life-span, sustenance and whether it is blissful or damned... I swear by Him other than Whom there is no God, one of you continues to perform Paradise-winning acts until, when between him and Paradise, there is but a

yard, Fate overtakes him and he performs actions deserving of Fire and thus enters Fire...<sup>70</sup>

But again, not all Hadīth is deterministic in the sense of utter predestination and there are Sunni Hadīths — although fewer in number — which handle the matter quite differently. There is e.g. the famous Hadīth, recorded both by al-Bukhārī and Muslim, according to which the Prophet said,

Every child is born in a natural state (i.e. a good state), but then its parents make either a Jew or a Christian or a Magian of it...<sup>71</sup>

And in a Hadīth contained in al-Tirmidhī, Ibn Mājah and Ahmad b. Hanbal the Prophet was asked by a Companion,

"Do you think that amulets and medicines we use and precautionary measures (against illness etc.) we take gainsay the Divine determinism?" The Prophet replied, "(No), they are themselves a part of Divine determinism."<sup>72</sup>

To this category of Hadīth also belongs the report that when 'Umar once ordered that the Muslim army be removed from a place struck with plague, someone objected to his order saying, "Do you flee from the Decree of God?" Whereupon 'Umar is said to have replied, "I flee from the Decree of God to the Decree of God." Despite this second type of Hadīth, however, which was to keep balance with the deterministic Hadīth, the latter exercised a preponderating effect on the Sunni orthodoxy as distinguished from the Shi'ah (who in this respect, continued the Mu'tazilah tradition). Later a number of influential voices arose within Sunni Islam against the preponderance of determinism, and especially of the Sufic interpretation of it, among the most eminent of these are Ibn Taymiyyah and Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindī.

The same endeavour of the *Ahl al-Sunnah* to steer a "middle path" and keep excessive trends in check is visible in the phenomenon of the pro and anti-Sufi Hadīth. This is not the place to go into the details of the origins of Sufism, but without denying that

(as in every society) there must have been among the Companions those in whose temperament puritanical and devotional trends were stronger than purely activist traits, it must be admitted that Sufism, as it developed from the second and, especially, third centuries, has little justification in the pristine practice of the Community. Its original impetuses came from politico-civil wars on the one hand and from the development of the law on the other. Its earliest manifestations are excessive individualist isolationism and ultra-puritanical asceticism. We have noted above the extreme isolationist Hadīth in connection with internecine wars. But this type of Hadīth expresses not only a political attitude but also a definite spiritual character. Further, according to a Hadīth in al-Bukhārī, *Kitāb al-Jihād*, the Prophet is represented as recommending that one should go "into a mountain cavity (*shi'b*), and leave people alone."<sup>73</sup> That this Hadīth should occur in the *Sahīh* of al-Bukhārī in the very chapter devoted to *Jihād* is a remarkable evidence both of the growing power of the Sufi movement and the catholic spirit of the *Ahl al-Sunnah*. But there are also equally powerful and extremely interesting counter-Hadīths. The Hadīths strongly recommending the earning of livelihood (against the extreme interpretation of the Sufi concept of *Tawakkul*) and condemning uncompromising indulgence in devotional piety are too well-known to be documented in detail.<sup>74</sup> A pointed Hadīth in this connection declares *Jihād* to be the Islamic equivalent of monasticism.<sup>75</sup> But the most remarkable Hadīth of this type is the one according to which the Prophet said,

Dear to me among (the things of) this world are women and scent; but my (true) enjoyment is in prayers.<sup>76</sup>

Each of these three individual elements of this Hadīth undoubtedly represents the *Sunnah* of the Prophet. But the way the enjoyment of this world has been combined with prayers in one breath and the mechanical juxtaposition of values of utterly different genre cannot but be an artificial construction quite unattributable to the Prophet. Indeed, it is certain that the Hadīth must have been directed against a target, and this target cannot be anything else but a Sufistic form of unintegrated spirituality.

In the developments outlined in the previous and the present sections we have deliberately chosen examples from what may be said to constitute the "Fundamental Ḥadīth" i.e. Ḥadīth which elucidates fundamental developments in the religious history of Islam in its classical, formative period and throws the formation of the orthodoxy (Sunnism) into bold relief. We have left out on purpose the development of the specifically legal Ḥadīth — although, of course, a concept like that of *Ijmā'*, is directly relevant as part of the framework of Muslim law also — because the specifically legal Ḥadīth does not so elucidate the crystallization of the orthodoxy as does Fundamental Ḥadīth. But otherwise the legal Ḥadīth shares the character of the "Fundamental Ḥadīth" and exhibits the same development in that legal Ḥadīth, reflects the "living Sunnah" of the early generations of the Muslims and not merely the Prophetic Sunnah in a specific and literal sense. Whether the literal Prophetic Sunnah, in its entirety, can be disentangled from the "living Sunnah" reflected in the Ḥadīth is extremely doubtful, if not impossible, although certain fundamental traits can be definitely delineated if a serious and systematic academic effort is made. And, surely, considerations of pure scholarship apart, Muslims are Islamically duty-bound to make such an effort and to trace the different stages through which legal Ḥadīth passed subsequently, point by point.

Take e.g. the question of *Ribā* in Ḥadīth. (We are not discussing the question of interest in Islam as such but illustrating the problem of legal Ḥadīth). There are two things which the Qur'an makes clear about the *Ribā* institution: (i) that it was a system whereby the substantive sum or commodity was multiplied "several-fold" (Qur'an, 3:130), and, therefore, (ii) that it was opposed to fair commerce, even though those who indulged in *Ribā* tried to maintain that it was a form of commercial transaction (Qur'an, 2:275 ff.). The only description or definition of *Ribā* that the historical Ḥadīth gives is what corroborates the Qur'anic statements viz. that the debtor, after the expiry of the fixed term of the debt, was asked either to pay up or to increase the capital.<sup>77</sup> There is no other shred of *historical* evidence. But the purely legal Ḥadīth subsequently multiplies and most certainly reflects the living Sunnah of the early period for its



formulation is based on legal practice and opinion. That there has been a development on the matter is clearly demonstrable. For one thing, there is a 'blanket' Hadīth attributed to 'Umar saying that the Prophet did not explain what comes under *Ribā* and, therefore, in the spirit of caution one ought to enlarge the coverage of *Ribā*-prohibition as much as possible.<sup>78</sup> But despite the continuous attempt at systematization of legal thought on the matter, not only is this development fairly visible in the Hadīth, but there still remained blatant contradictions, e.g. on the question as to whether selling of animals on the basis of interest in kind is allowed or not — each view is supported by Hadīths.<sup>79</sup> The oft-quoted Hadīth that commodities covered by *Ribā* must be exchanged "in equal amount and con-presently" is obviously contradicted by an equally famous Hadīth that *Ribā* is only on deferred payment and has no relevance to con-present exchange.<sup>80</sup> This state of affairs apparently reflects two schools of legal opinion on the matter. The tendency has undoubtedly been towards greater strictness and rigidity, and later, indeed, not only interest but even the acceptance of a present by the creditor from the debtor is forbidden by Hadīth.<sup>81</sup> We move far, indeed, from the Qur'anic background and a general principle is put forward in the form of a Hadīth which states, "Every advantage that may accrue from the credit is interest."<sup>82</sup> Even the exchange of manufactured gold and silver for an increased quantity of the same raw materials — an increase justified and, indeed, necessitated by workmanship and labour comes to be forbidden.<sup>83</sup>

## 5. Sunnah and Hadīth

We have, in the foregoing, analyzed 'objectively' and, in the eyes of those with strong traditionalist attitudes and sensibilities, ruthlessly (and perhaps also 'unfairly?') some of the main lines of Hadīth. But we must be clear as to what exactly all this amounts to. It is absolutely imperative to be exactly clear about the real issues at stake particularly because there are strong trends in our society which in the name of what they call 'progressivism' wish to brush aside the Hadīth and the Prophetic Sunnah. In their anxiety to "clear the way",

they resort to methods much more questionable than Nero's method of rebuilding Rome. Not only are the trends in question lacking in foresight, they exhibit a singular lack of clarity of issues and a dismal ignorance of the evolution of Hadīth itself. Without any grounding either in scholarship or in insight they sometimes tell us that the Hadīth is unhistorical and *therefore* unreliable as a guide to the Prophetic Sunnah. At other times we are naively told that Hadīth may be history but it has no *Sharī'ah*-normativeness i.e. even if Hadīth is genuine, it contains no Sunnah for us. 'Progress' we all want, not *despite* Islam, nor *besides* Islam but *because of* Islam for we all believe that Islam, as it was launched as a movement on earth in seventh century Arabia, represented pure progress — moral and material. But we can neither share nor forgive 'confusionism' and obscurantism. What shall we progress *from* and what shall we progress *with*, and, indeed, *whereto* shall we progress? An answer to these questions demands a sober and constructive recourse to our history. What is the real relationship between Sunnah and Hadīth? Go to the contemporary crusading and verbose disquisitions on Hadīth for an answer to this crucial question and search in vain for an answer. It may be remarked here that there was no group in classical Islam — be it the Khawārij or the Mu'tazilah — who ever denied the validity of the Sunnah<sup>84</sup> and that what they objected to was the formulation of the Sunnah in Hadīth terms.

We may further point to the pathetic irony that very often the anti-Hadīth argument (which is also assumed to be anti-Sunnah) is based on subjectively and naively selected Hadīth, to the effect that the Prophet or 'Umar or someone else from the earliest authorities had forbidden or discouraged the transmission of Hadīth from the Prophet. Besides the intrinsic irrationality of this point of view, this *anti-Hadīth* Hadīth turns out, on closer historical examination, to be itself a direct product of the Hadīth movement. And if all Hadīth is given up, what remains but a yawning chasm of fourteen centuries between us and the Prophet? And in the vacuity of this chasm not only must the Qur'an slip from our fingers under our subjective whims — for the only thing that anchors it is the Prophetic *activity* itself — but even the very existence and integrity of the Qur'an and,

indeed, the existence of the Prophet himself become an unwarranted myth.

We shall now endeavour to show that technical Hadīth, as distinguished from historical and biographical Hadīth, although it is by and large not historical, must nevertheless be considered as normative in a basic sense and we shall try to indicate by illustration what this basic sense is. These are the points we wish to make in this connection:

1. That the technical Hadīth is by and large not historical in its actual formulations is shown by the various examples dealt with in the preceding pages. It may be said that we have, after all, given a few examples from a vast literature and that our conclusion is too sweeping. Now the first thing to be remembered in this connection is that the examples we have adduced are what we have called "Fundamental Hadīth" i.e. Hadīth concerned with the Islamic Methodology itself. If the Hadīth about the fundamental principles of *Ijmā'* and Hadīth themselves proves unhistorical, the *prima facie* case for the historicity of most other Hadīth is demolished. It must be noticed that we are saying "most other Hadīth" and not "all other Hadīth." But this difference between 'most' and 'all' — with the notable exception of Hadīth about the *Farā'id* — is all but theoretical and is, at present at least, neither locatable nor definable: the credentials of each Hadīth must be separately examined on historical grounds. The second objection against us must be that we have not taken the *Isnād* — the guaranteeing chain of transmission — into account. Now, we do not underrate the importance of *Isnād*. Quite apart from the fact that *Isnād* gave rise to a vast and genuine biographical information-literature — a unique Islamic achievement — it has certainly contributed to minimizing Hadīth forgery. Indeed, a vast number of forged Hadīths have been eliminated by the untiring activity of our traditionists on the basis of *Isnād*. But although *Isnād* is important in a negative manner, it cannot constitute a positive final argument. For although a person 'A' who is

generally considered reliable may be shown to have actually met another generally reliable person 'B' (which point is itself hard to establish), this constitutes *no* proof that a particular Hadīth in question was transmitted by 'B' to 'A'. But the most fatal objection to considering *Isnād* the positive final argument is that *Isnād* itself is a relatively late development originating around the turn of the first century.<sup>85</sup> The professedly predictive Hadīths about political troubles in al-Bukhārī and Muslim have excellent *Isnāds* and yet we cannot accept them if we are historically honest.

2. But the most fundamental objection to our thesis of non-historicity of Hadīth will not be scientific but religious viz. that Hadīth will thus turn out to be a gigantic conspiracy. The question, however, is whether the *Ahl al-Hadīth* themselves regarded their activity as strictly historical. We recall here the Hadīth already quoted above viz. that the Prophet said, "Whatever of *good* saying there be, I can be taken to have said it." It is idle to say that this refers only to *moral* Hadīth, for political and legal Hadīth has obvious moral implications. Even the famous Hadīth according to which the Prophet said, "Whoever tells a deliberate lie about me, should prepare a seat in Hell," was later modified to read, "Whoever tells a deliberate lie... *in order to lead people astray*..." On this basis then a general principle was formulated that "Hadīth arousing pious feelings is not to be rejected". This principle is attributed by al-Nawawī [see his commentary on the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim, Karachi (n.d.) vol.I, p.8] to the Karrāmīyah and he complains that many ignorant people and preachers have followed it. Even the famous Hadīth according to which Hadīth which is in consonance with the Qur'an is to be accepted, does anything but argue for historicity. It must, therefore, be concluded that Hadīth represents the interpreted spirit of the Prophetic teaching — it represents the "living Sunnah."

3. But if the Hadīth is not strictly historical, it is quite obvious

that it is not divorced from the Prophet's Sunnah, either. Indeed, there is an intimate and ineliminable connection between the Hadīth and the Prophet's Sunnah. We recall what we established in our first article viz. that the earliest generations of Muslims — judges, lawyers, theoreticians and politicians — had elaborated and interpreted the Prophetic Model (Sunnah) in the interests of the needs of the Muslims and the resultant product in each generation was the Sunnah in sense (ii) [see part A] i.e. the living Sunnah. Now, the Hadīth is nothing but a reflection in a verbal mode of this living Sunnah. The Prophet's Sunnah is, therefore, in the Hadīth just as it existed in the living Sunnah. But the living Sunnah contained not only the general Prophetic Model but also regionally standardized interpretations of that Model — thanks to the ceaseless activity of personal *Ijtihād* and *Ijmā'*. That is why innumerable differences existed in the living Sunnah. But this is exactly true of Hadīth also. This is because Hadīth reflects the living Sunnah. Indeed, a striking feature of Hadīth is its diversity and the fact that almost on all points it reflects different points of view. This point, while it shows the lack of strict historicity of Hadīth, just like the earlier living Sunnah, has been the most potent factor of catholicity in the hands of the *Ahl al-Sunnah* i.e. the majority of the Muslims. For the *Ahl al-Sunnah*, through Hadīth, tried — largely successfully — to steer a middle course and produce a middle-of-the-road synthesis. The main relevant difference between the living Sunnah of the early generations and Hadīth formulation is that whereas the former was a living and on-going process, the latter is formal and has sought to confer absolute permanence on the living Sunnah synthesis of roughly the first three centuries. This, no doubt, was the need of the hour, for an on-going process without some formalization threatens, at some point of time or another, to break the continuity of the process itself by destroying its identity. But what resulted from Hadīth eventually was not *some* formalization but a total fixation. The present need undoubtedly is to re-loosen this formalism and to resume the threads from

the point where the living Sunnah had voluntarily emptied itself into the Hadīth dam. But it is at precisely this juncture that a voice whispers (besides much other wild advice), "Hadīth and/or Sunnah are incurable reactionarism; leave them roundly if you want to progress." Is this the voice of hope or despair? The application of the principle in the following illustration will tell.

4. We have said repeatedly — perhaps to the annoyance of some readers — that Hadīth, although it has as its ultimate basis the Prophetic Model, represents the workings of the early generations on that Model. Hadīth, in fact, is the sum total of *aphorisms* formulated and put out by Muslims themselves, ostensibly about the Prophet although not without an ultimate historical touch with the Prophet. Its very aphoristic character shows that it is not historical. It is rather a gigantic and monumental commentary on the Prophet by the early Community. Therefore, though based on the Prophet, it also constitutes an epitome of the wisdom of classical Muslims.

Now, if we listen to the voice referred to above, we get alarming results. We have shown above that the Hadīth about *Ijmā'*, for example, is *historically* unacceptable. If we follow the voice, we should reject the doctrine of *Ijmā'*. But, can we? At this stage, however, the voice might say that *Ijmā'* can be grounded in the Qur'an, for the Book of God says,

*Cling together to the rope of God and do not disperse* (Qur'an, 3:103).

But although this is a command for unity, it is not exactly *Ijmā'*, for *Ijmā'* is "*unanimously arriving at a decision*". If this verse had meant *Ijmā'*, al-Shāfi'ī and others would long ago have advanced it as an argument on the point. But let us suppose the Qur'anic verse does mean *Ijmā'*. Even then the nature of *Ijmā'* remains unspecified. Is it something statistical or qualitative? i.e., is *Ijmā'* total or does it leave room for difference of opinion. Now, we find a good deal of Hadīth

which encourages the expression of a dissenting voice, and such Hadīth appears in various direct and indirect forms. This shows that one *Ijmā'* may be changed by a subsequent *Ijmā'* and further that *Ijmā'* is a matter of practice and not that of pure theory involving truth-values. An *Ijmā'* can be right or wrong, or partly right and partly wrong, rather than true or false. The Community, indeed, cannot take itself for granted claiming theoretical infallibility. It must always *aspire* both to understand and to do the right.

The character of Hadīth is, therefore, essentially synthetic. Further, when we test the *Ijmā'* — Hadīth on what is *historically* known about the Prophet, we find that the former develops out of the Prophetic Sunnah, for the Prophet not only made every effort to keep the Community together, he both encouraged and elicited a unity of thought and purpose. The Qur'anic term *shūrā* refers to this activity. And this catholic and synthetic character of Hadīth is not confined to this one point — it runs through almost the entire gamut of moral, social, legal and political doctrines. We have brought out this synthetic character of Hadīth while discussing the formulation and expression of the Orthodoxy in the last section.

It must, of course, be emphatically pointed out that a revaluation of different elements in Hadīth and their thorough reinterpretation under the changed moral and social conditions of today must be carried out. This can be done only by a historical study of the Hadīth — by reducing it to the "living Sunnah" and by clearly distinguishing from the situational background the real value embodied in it. We shall find thereby that some of the major emphases of our traditional Orthodoxy will have to be modified and re-stated. Take, e.g., the case of determinism and free-will. At the time of the early Umayyads who advocated pure determinism, free-will had to be emphasized and this is precisely what Hasan al-Basrī and the early Mu'tazilah did. But when the Mu'tazilah humanism seemed to run riot and threatened the very bases of religion, Ahmad b. Hanbal and his colleagues accentuated the Will and Power of God over against the Mu'tazilah rationalism. But this doctrine of Divine Power and determinism subsequently became, and remains to this day, the hallmark of orthodoxy. This has surely outrun its original function

and has been in fact very injurious to the moral and social life of the Community especially through its wilder interpretations by later philosophers and Sufis. The preponderant deterministic traditions in the works of Hadīth must, therefore, be interpreted in their correct historical perspective and their true *functional* significance in a *historical context* clearly brought out. The same principle of interpretation must be applied to other spiritual and social problems such as the age-old tension between the *Sharī'ah* and the claims of the Sufi adepts.

On the very same principle of situational interpretation, by resurrecting the real moral value from the situational background, must be handled the problem of legal Hadīth. We must view the legal Hadīth as a problem to be re-treated and not as a ready-made law to be directly applied. This is certainly a delicate question and must be handled wisely and cautiously, but handled it must be. Recall e.g., the question of interest. The Qur'an, as stated above, brings out the real reason behind the prohibition of *Ribā* saying that it cannot come under the definition of a commercial transaction because it is a process whereby the capital is unjustly increased manifold. The historical Hadīth confirms this by informing us that this was, in fact, the practice of the pre-Islamic Arabs. But we have seen the moral strictness by which legal opinion brought various activities under the definition of *Ribā* by formulating a general principle that *every loan which brings any advantage to the creditor is Ribā*. In the same breath we are told that *Ribā* applies exclusively to the articles of food, gold and silver and beyond these it has no application.<sup>86</sup> This obviously implies that, say, a certain quantity of cotton may be loaned on the stipulation that six months hence it must be returned with any amount of increase the creditor wishes to impose at the time of stipulation. This, of course, contradicts the general principle quoted just now. This whole development shows that it is a progressive moral interpretation of the Qur'anic prohibition sought to be rigidly formalized. We have certainly no reason to accept *this* specific moral-legal interpretation in all situations and under all conditions. Further, that the bank-interest of today is legitimately covered by the definition of commerce is



difficult to deny. It is for the economists and the monetary technicians to say whether interestless banking can function in today's world or not. If it works, it is all to the good. But if it does not, then to insist that today's commercial banking — with an overall controlled economy — comes under the Qur'anic prohibition and is banned by the Prophetic Sunnah is not so much historical or religious honesty but an acute crisis of human confidence and uncompromising cynicism. The Qur'an and the Sunnah were given for intelligent moral understanding and implementation, not for rigid formalism.

On some such line of re-treatment, we can reduce the Hadith to Sunnah — what it was in the beginning — and by situational interpretation can resurrect the norms which we can then apply to our situation today. It will have been noticed that although we do not accept Hadith in general as strictly historical, we have not used the terms 'forgery' or 'concoction' with reference to it but have employed the term 'formulation'. This is because although Hadith *verbally speaking* does not go back to the Prophet, its spirit certainly does, and Hadith is largely the situational interpretation and formulation of this Prophetic Model or spirit. The term 'forgery' and its equivalents would, therefore, be false when used about the nature of Hadith and the term 'formulation' would be literally true. We cannot call Hadith a forgery because it reflects the living Sunnah and the living Sunnah was not a forgery but a progressive interpretation and formulation of the Prophetic Sunnah.

What we want now to do is to recast the Hadith into living Sunnah terms by historical interpretation so that we may be able to derive norms from it for ourselves through an adequate ethical theory and its legal re-embodiment.

One anxiety will trouble many conscientious Muslims. It is that if it is found impossible to locate and define the historically and specifically Prophetic content of the Sunnah, then the connection between the Prophet and the Community would become elusive and the concept "Prophetic Sunnah" would be irrevocably liquidated. But this worry is not real. To begin with, there are a number of things which are undeniable historical contents of the Prophetic Sunnah. Prayer, *zakāt*, fasting, pilgrimage etc. with their detailed manner of

application, are so Prophetic that only a dishonest or an insane person would deny this. Indeed, the historical Ḥadīth i.e., the biography of the Prophet is, in its main points, absolutely clear and would serve as the chief anchoring point of the technical Ḥadīth itself when the latter is interpreted. Indeed, the overall character not only of the Prophet but of the early Community is indubitably fixed and, in its essential features, is *not at all* open to question — even though there may be questions about the historical details. It is against this background of what is surely known of the Prophet and the early Community (besides the Qur'an) that we can interpret Ḥadīth. The purely Prophetic elements in technical Ḥadīth may be hard to trace, it may even be impossible to recover the entirety of them without a shadow of doubt, but a certain amount will undoubtedly be retrieved. But our argument does involve a reversal of the traditional picture on one salient point in that we are putting more reliance on pure history than Ḥadīth and are seeking to judge the latter partly in the light of the former (*partly*, because there is also the Qur'an whereas the traditional picture is the other way round. But the traditional picture is already biased in favour of technical Ḥadīth; there is no intrinsic evidence for this claim and much intrinsic evidence that we have adduced is *against* it. The alleged criticism of Muhammad b. Ishāq, an early biographer of the Prophet, by Mālik is probably itself a later traditionist view for we find Abū Yūsuf quoting from Ibn Ishāq.<sup>87</sup>

## NOTES

### Part A

1. Khālid b. 'Atabah al-Hudhalī says (*Tāj al-'Arūs*, s.v.):  
"Do not be hesitant about a Sunnah which you have introduced, for the first person to be satisfied with a Sunnah is the one who has introduced it (i.e. has performed it first of all)".
2. *Vide* all the major dictionaries, s.v.
3. *Tāj al-'Arūs* refers it only to Shimr, although even there it is not absolutely clear whether Sunnah is to be taken in a purely physical sense in its primitive connotation. There seems to be a widespread prejudice that the Arabs, in building abstract concepts, always used words which primarily denoted

physical phenomena.

4. Published with other works attributed to Abū Hanīfah (Cairo), p.38.
5. In the volume *"Islam"*, chapter III, published by George Weidenfeld and Nicolson, (London) in their series *"History of Religion"*.
6. Qur'an, 33:62; 35:43.
7. Qur'an, 33:21; 60:4, 6.
8. This letter was published by H. Ritter in *Der Islam*, Vol.21, 67 ff.
9. *Al-Aghānī*, XV, 124; the *Hāshimiyāt* of al-Kumayt were critically edited by J. Horovitz in 1904.
10. *Hāshimiyāt*, poem No.8, verse i ff.
11. Abū Yūsuf's *Kitāb al-Kharāj* (Cairo 1302 A.H.), p.8, line 22.
12. Qur'an 73:5.
13. Qur'an 18:6; 20:1.
14. E.g. Qur'an 4:64.
15. For times of prayers see the *Muwattā'* of Mālik, Ḥadīth No.1:  
 ... 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz one day delayed a prayer. 'Urwah ibn al-Zubayr entered upon him and informed him that al-Mughīrah ibn Shu'bah, while in Kūfah, once delayed a prayer, but Abū Mas'ūd al-Anṣārī came to him and said: "What is this, O Mughīrah! Did you not know that Gabriel came down and prayed and the Prophet prayed (with him); then (again) Gabriel prayed (i.e. the next prayer) and the Prophet prayed (with him); then again Gabriel prayed (i.e. the third prayer) and the Prophet did likewise; then again Gabriel prayed (i.e. the fourth prayer) and likewise did the Prophet; and then again Gabriel prayed (i.e. the fifth prayer) and so did the Prophet? The Prophet then said, 'Have I been commanded this?'" (On hearing this) 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz exclaimed, "Mind what you are relating, O 'Urwah! Is it the case that Gabriel it was who appointed the times of prayer for the Prophet?" 'Urwah replied, "So was Bashīr son of Abū Mas'ūd al-Anṣārī in the habit of relating from his father".  
 Hence forward, whenever prayers are emphasized in the Ḥadīth, the word *Ṣalāh* is almost invariably accompanied by the phrase: "*'ala miqātiḥā*" — [Prayers] at their proper times. This seems to point to a campaign for the fixing of standard times for prayers.
16. Quoted from the manuscript of my above-mentioned work.
17. Ibn al-Muqaffa's *Risālah fi'l-Sahābah*, in *Rasā'il al-Bulaghā'* (Cairo 1930).
18. Haydarabad edition, 1335 A.H., Vol.I, p.2.
19. *Ibid.*, Vol.II, p.260.

20. *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p.259.
21. *Kitāb al-Umm*, Vol. VII, pp.240 ff, 248, 256, 258.
22. *Ibid.*, VII, pp.242, 246.
23. *Ibid.*, VII, p.242 etc.
24. See especially *ibid.* (Vol. VII), p.255, 8 lines from the bottom ff.
25. Especially *ibid.*, p.246, line 15.

### Part B

26. Abū Yūsuf's *al-Radd 'alā Siyar al-Awzā'ī* (Hyderabad, n.d.), pp.131-5; *ibid.*, pp.32-3.
27. *Ibid.*, p.76.
28. *Ibid.*, p.11.
29. Al-Shāfi'ī, *Kitāb al-Umm*, vol. vii. p.239, last line; p.240 line 5.
30. Abū Yūsuf. *op. cit.* p.40 ff.
31. *Ibid.*, p.41.
32. *Ibid.*, p.31.
33. *Ibid.*, p.32.
34. *Ibid.*, pp.24-32.
35. Abū Yūsuf, *Āthār*, (Cairo 1355 A.H.) Nos. 887, 889. It is possible that "*al-Kalām*" originally meant just "talk" but by Abū Yūsuf's time it had acquired a technical meaning.
36. *Ibid.*, No. 581.
37. *Ibid.*, No. 924.
38. *Ibid.*, No. 917 and the footnote.
39. Abū Yūsuf, *al-Radd* etc., p.21.
40. *Ibid.*, footnote to p.17.
41. *Ibid.*, p.21.
42. *Ibid.*, pp.85, 61-2, 65, 75, 13-7.
43. *Ibid.*, 15, 85 etc.
44. *Kitāb al-Umm*, vii, 212-3.
45. *Ibid.*, p.212.
46. *Ibid.*, pp.906-7.
47. Al-Shāfi'ī, *al-Risālah* (Cairo 1309 A.H.), ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir, pp.401-2.

48. *Ibid.*, pp.403-4.
49. *Ibid.*, pp.397-8.
50. Apud *Mishkāt al-Maṣābīh* (Dihlī 1932), pp.30, 32.
51. Abū Yūsuf, *Āthār*, No. 959.
52. Al-Shāfi'ī, *al-Risālah*, pp.473-4.
53. Abū Yūsuf, *al-Radd* etc., p.25.
54. *Al-Risālah*, p.224.
55. Al-Tirmidhī, *Kitāb al-Fitan*, No. 7.
56. *ap. Mishkāt al-Maṣābīh*, p.461.
57. *ap. ibid.*, p.463.
58. *ap. ibid.*, p.461.
59. *ap. ibid.*, p.462.
60. *ap. ibid.*, p.462.
61. *ap. ibid.*, p.464.
62. *ap. ibid.*, p.30.
63. *ap. ibid.*, p.14.
64. Abū Yūsuf, *Āthār*, No. 891.
65. *ap. Mishkāt*, p.18; see also p.17, the Hadīth from al-Bukhārī and Muslim: "The adulterer does not commit adultery in a state of Faith..."
66. *ap. ibid.*, p.22.
67. *ap. ibid.*, p.22.
68. *ap. ibid.*, p.20.
69. *ap. ibid.*, pp.23, 20 etc.
70. *ap. ibid.*, p.20.
71. *ap. ibid.*, p.21.
72. *ap. ibid.*, p.22.
73. Al-Bukhārī, *Kitāb al-Jihād*, No.2.
74. E.g. *ap. Mishkāt*, p.27; pp.241-3; and several Hadīths in *Kitāb al-'Ilm*, pp.32-38.
75. Ahmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad* 3, 82, 266.
76. Al-Nasā'ī, *'Ishrat al-Nisā'*, No. 1.
77. Al-Shāfi'ī, *al-Risālah*, p.234; al-Bayhaqī, *al-Sunan al-Kubrā* (Hyderabad 1352 A.H.), vol. v, p.275.

78. *ap. Mishkāt*, p.246.
79. *ap. Mishkāt*, p.245 (both Ḥadīths are given there); al-Bayhaqī, *op. cit.*, pp.287-8.
80. For the first view see al-Bayhaqī, *op. cit.*, *ibid.*, pp.280-81.
81. *ap. Mishkāt*, p.246.
82. E.g., *al-Bayhaqī, op. cit.* p.350, line 10ff.
83. *Ibid.*, p.279, 15ff.
84. For the *Mu'tazilah* see Al-Shāfi'ī, *Kitāb al-Umm*, vol. vii, p.252, line 15. For the *Khārījī* acceptance of Sunnah, see e.g. al-Jāhiz, *al-Bayān* (Cairo 1948), vol. ii, p.122, line 13, a speech by the *Khārījī* (Abādī) leader, Abū Ḥamzah. The *Khārījīs*, indeed, even accepted Ḥadīth (see Ibn Qutaybah, *Ta'wīl mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth*, Cairo 1326 A.H., p.3.).
85. See L. Caetani, *Annali Dell' Islam*, Introduction, section on *Isnād*. The beginnings of *Isnād* are generally attributed by Muslim authorities themselves to the Civil War (*al-Fitnah*) i.e. the murder of the Umayyad Caliph al-Walīd. See also J. Schacht, *Origins etc.*, p.36.
86. Al-Bayhaqī, *op. cit.*, p.286.
87. Abū Yūsuf, *al-Radd...*, pp.7, 12 etc.

## THE FALLACIES OF ANTI-HADĪTH ARGUMENTS

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SHAH SHAHIDULLAH FARIDI

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It has become the common practice in modern times for western-educated people in Islamic countries to claim to be able to reinterpret Islam by reference to the Holy Qur'an only, disregarding entirely the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet on one pretext or another. Unwittingly or wittingly by this means they strike at the very foundation of Islam on which it has been firmly based for the last fourteen centuries. The aim of these attempts is to reduce Islam to a set of general principles, many of which are of their own conception, or derived from their study of western literature, and so enable them to live a life patterned on western Europe while fixing the label of Islam to it. This practice has become so common in its various form that it is time that the position of the Sunnah of the Prophet be made clear to those Muslims, who, for lack of essential knowledge of the structure of the religion of Islam may be enticed into this misguided way of thinking. The spread of these so-called "modern" ideas would have incalculably disastrous effects on the thought and practice, and collective life of the world of Islam.

It should be well understood that the exponents of this new-fangled theory (new-fangled with relation to the original authorities of Islam, though it has been tried out on various occasions in Islamic history) are themselves entirely devoid of the essential knowledge required for expressing any opinion about Islam. The Qur'an has been studied in translation without any solid grounding in the Arabic language, the books of Hadīth and the earliest sources of Islamic Law have not been studied at all, even Islamic history is only known at third or fourth hand. How anyone, with such hopelessly inadequate preparation can have the affrontery to pontificate about such a deep subject as Islam, is one of the tragedies of the modern era. In previous, more enlightened times he would have been dismissed as a mischeivous ignoramus but today even the flimsiest superficiality passes for learning, and mere mental aberrations for thought. History is blatantly contradicted, logic is flouted, as if these two essentials of intelligent human thinking are of no value. Indeed, they are of no value to those who wish to put forward pure fictions of their imagination as truth, for history and logic are their worst enemies.

We intend to show here that the Sunnah of the Prophet is an integral part of Islam in addition to the Qur'an. No one denies or can deny, that the Qur'an is the foundation of Islam, being the direct word of God to man. All principles of thought and action, spirituality and morality, private and social life in Islam are ultimately derived from the Holy Book. But the Holy Book itself was sent through the Prophet in fact, the Prophet is the guarantee of the Holy Book. It is necessary, in order to be a messenger of God, to be free from any possibility of error and deviation, for any possibility of error would affect the reliability of the Holy Book. This is why the profession of faith of a Muslim consists of two fundamentals only, belief in the Divinity of Allah and the truth of the Prophethood of Muhammad. The truth of the Qur'an follows from these two basic postulates, and so it is not mentioned separately. But perhaps our present day "reformers" do not accept the "Good Word" (*Kalimah Tayyibah*) which has from the beginning been the mark distinguishing the believer from the unbeliever, for it is only referred



to and not spelled out in the Qur'an. To what depths of absurdity the misused logic of man can sink!

A messenger of God, being necessarily free from error, receives continuous and permanent guidance from God. This guidance has been described most meaningfully by God Himself in the Qur'an:

*Thou art indeed of the envoys, on a straight path (36:3-4).*

The Prophet cannot take any step but that it will be on the straight path; it is impossible for him to deviate from this path even an inch onto a crooked one. God had elucidated the meaning of this straight path on another occasion:

*Indeed, my lord is on a straight path (11:56).*

It is the path to God, the path of truth and guidance, and the Prophet has been assured by God that he is without question and without intermission on this path. Not only this, God also states of Himself that:

*He guides whom He wills to a straight path (2:142).*

And then again assures the Prophet that:

*Thou indeed guidest (men) to a straight path (42:52),*

i.e., not only the Prophet himself is on the Straight Path, but guidance too has been confirmed by God as leading to this path, and guidance is, as it were, God's guidance. The Prophet, like Muslims, used to pray "Guide us to the straight path", as in Sūrah al-Fātiḥah, since the continuous guidance he received was not of himself but of God, and as a servant of God he was continually in need of it, but God has in his case permanently granted this prayer in the Qur'an itself:

*Thou art indeed of the envoys, on a straight path (36:3-4).*

It is established by these verses of God's Word that the Prophet is guided permanently and absolutely by God, and this guidance is not merely confined to the receiving and transmitting of the Qur'an. God's assurance in this regard is without any provisions or limitations. But the "modernists" not only claim that the guidance given to the Prophet is confined to the Qur'an, but also that his function as a Prophet is confined to the delivering of that Qur'an, that the rest of his activities were only carried on in the capacity of the leader of the community, and consequently have no permanent significance. But God has given us a book "in which there is no doubt" and the Prophet's functions have been enumerated in detail:

*Allah has indeed shown grace to the believers in sending them a messenger from among themselves who reciteth unto them His revelations, and purifieth them and teacheth them the Book and Wisdom (3:164).*

Here God has told us of the four functions of the Prophet, of which only the first refers to the Qur'an, "reciting His revelations"; the other three are besides this, of "purifying", "teaching the Book" and "teaching Wisdom". These four functions have been described as the purpose for which God has sent the Messenger, and God's guidance to man will be fulfilled and completed by all and not by one only. All these functions are therefore part of God's guidance through the person of the Prophet.

The purpose of sending the Messenger is, apart from "reciting His revelations," firstly to "purify" them, for the proper understanding of the Book and "wisdom," and the ability to put them into practice, is unattainable unless a purification of the heart, the centre of the will and intentions, has not been achieved. This purification consists of the spiritual influence of the Holy Prophet's personality, and his continual exhortations to the believers by word and example in the light of the Qur'an to purify their thoughts and deeds. The next stage after this purification is the "teaching of the Book," that is, to explain and demonstrate the implications of the Book, and to apply it to the circumstances of human life in the most

excellent way. Finally, the "teaching of wisdom" refers to the development into a science of certain subjects treated in general in the Qur'an, such as spiritual science, moral science, the science of the *Shari'ah*, of government etc., regarding all of which we can find valuable guidance both theoretical and practical from the Prophet. These four main functions of the Prophet have been instituted and carried out by the command under the guidance of God Himself, and constitute an integral part of God's message to mankind. To state that only the first function is of permanent significance is simply to flout the Word of God.

The Qur'an is not only "without any doubt" but it is also a Clear Book (*Kitāb al-Mubīn*) and the basic principles of the Islamic faith have been stated by God in the most unmistakable terms. The status and importance of the Sunnah have been decisively asserted in the following verse:

*You have indeed in the Messenger of God as good example for him who looks forward to God and the Last Day and remembers God much (33:21)*

By the use of this expression "a good example" (*Uswatun Hasanah*), Allah has given the Sunnah and the Hadith of the Prophet a permanent and vital position in the religion of Islam, and further has mentioned as the qualification of those who will appreciate and accept this position that they look forward to their meeting with God and to the Last Day, and as a result always remember Allah. Following the Prophet's example has been made a part of faith, an accompaniment to faith in Allah, and the Last Day, and anyone who does not accept and follow this example cannot claim, by the evidence of the Word of God itself, to be complete in faith. Here the word "example" has been used absolutely, not limited to any particular aspect of the Prophet's life, and so covers his words, his deeds, his permissions and prohibitions, his private and public behaviour, his worship and his administration, his moral qualities and his manners.

The Prophet's Sunnah is hereby elevated to the position of a

divine institution in Islam, and his sayings a divinely authorised interpretation of God's message. In the verse discussed previously, God stated *Allah hath indeed shown grace to the believers in sending them a messenger among themselves who reciteth unto them the Book and wisdom*. The special grace shown to the believers in the Final Message of Allah to mankind is that Allah has not only sent an authoritative Book in which the principles of faith and practice are laid down, but in order to make the "straight path" more clearly distinguished and easier to travel, has also sent a living example to show the perfect expression of these principles in human life; in other words, Allah has granted us that special grace of sending both the principles and their application. The Qur'an is the verbal message, and the Prophet is the human message — the projection of the verbal message into the sphere of human behaviour. Allah has stated that those who look forward to meeting Him and to the Last Day, and who remember Him much, will certainly accept this human message, and the more their faith and their remembrance become firmly established, the more they will be able to profit by it and to identify themselves with it.

Those Muslims from the Companions onwards who have always treated the following of the Sunnah as an article of faith were not merely acting on their personal opinion; they were obeying the clear injunctions of the Qur'an, and this explains the utmost care they took to preserve the Prophet's practice and sayings and transmit them to those who came after.

We have seen that Allah has defined the functions of the Prophet, and set up his personality in all its aspects as a model on which Muslims should pattern their lives. It remains to discover exactly to what extent Muslims are obliged to follow this pattern; with what particular emphasis this duty has been laid upon them. The reply to this question is immediately forthcoming:

*Obey Allah and obey the Prophet (5:92),*  
where we are told that just as Allah's orders in the Qur'an are worthy of obedience, so are the interpretations and applications of Allah's orders by the Prophet equally binding on the Muslim

Community. In fact, Allah's orders and the orders of the Prophet based on them are essentially one, for:

*Whoever obeys the Prophet, he has obeyed Allah (4:80).*

It is part of Allah's infinite wisdom and kindness towards mankind that the main principles of Islam have been stated clearly in the Qur'an, while the application of these principles has been left to the Prophet, but the Prophet's orders are authorised and confirmed by Allah, so that obedience to the Prophet's order is really obedience to Allah.

It is plain from the preceding examination of the Sunnah in Islam and of what Muslim's attitude should be towards it, that the whole life of the Prophet is inspired by Allah, that he is perfectly guided at every moment by divine revelation. It would be impossible otherwise for Allah to hold him up as an unfailing example to mankind, or to order implicit obedience to him. But the highly illogical stand of the "modernists" is that revelation is confined only to the Qur'an and that the Prophet's words and deeds, apart from transmitting the Qur'an to mankind, are uninspired by Allah, and therefore not binding on succeeding generations. This stand, as has already been shown, is quite untenable in the light of Allah's commands to the Muslim Community regarding the personality of the Prophet, but it is untenable also for the reason that the Qur'an makes it quite clear that revelation (*wahy*) is not confined to Books of Allah, but is a continuous process in the lives of the Prophets. There are numerous incidents related in the Qur'an about Prophets receiving revelation as a process quite apart from the revelation of Books. For instance, Allah said to Adam:

*O Adam, dwell thou and thy wife in the Garden (2:35),*

and their Lord called them:

*Did I not forbid you . . . (7:22).*

In the case of Noah:

*And it was inspired in Noah: No one of thy folk will believe save*

*him who hath believed already (11:36);  
Load therein two of every kind (11:11);  
O Noah, he is not one of thy household (11:46).*

Allah states of Abraham:

*That is our argument, which we gave to Abraham against his  
folk (6:83);  
O Abraham, forsake this (11:26);*

Jacob said:

*I do indeed scent the presence of Joseph,  
and when he retrieved his eyesight, he said:  
Did I not say to you that I know from Allah that which you  
know not? (12:94 ff.).*

In the case of Joseph:

*We inspired in him: thou wilt tell them of this deed of theirs  
when they know not (12:15).*

Allah called to Moses in the valley of Tuwā:

*O Moses, verily I am thy Lord (20:12),  
and then:*

*. . . hearken to what is inspired.*

Again:

*We inspired Moses saying: Take away my slaves by night  
(20:77).*

These are only some of the many instances which can be given, in all of which reference is made to revelations from Allah to the Prophets on which have nothing to do with the revelations of Books.

We cannot stress too much the point that in order to be a "good example" to Muslims, it is necessary that the Prophet be at all times under the inspiration of Allah. Matters connected with the preaching of Islam and spiritual training of the believers, are specifically stated by Allah to be under His auspices, but even in the details of worldly life without inspiration it would be impossible to be an example, and

that too for all Muslims at all times. No man by his own efforts or by dint only of his own natural qualities could personify Islam. It is no argument to bring forward the occasions when the Prophet stated that he was only speaking from personal opinion. These occasions were when the matter concerned did not involve any religious or moral question, such as methods of cultivation, or the placing of the troops in battle. Another occasion was when deciding a case after hearing the evidence of both sides, for it is part of the Prophet's example, as inspired by Allah, that cases should be decided on the outward evidence, and anyone who falsifies evidence in such a way that his deceit is not outwardly apparent, may have the case decided in his favour but have to pay for his deceit before Allah. The Prophet has been expressly ordered in the Qur'an to decide matters of worldly expediency after consulting with his followers:

*Consult with them upon the conduct of affairs (3:159).*

The exercise of human reason on the occasions which warrant it is also part of the Prophet's example, and is under the commands of Allah. Neither is it an argument to say that the Prophet used to draw conclusions from the Qur'an by the exercise of reason, for Allah has made it quite plain, as has already been shown, that the Prophet's application of Qur'anic principles is authorised by Himself and is to be taken as from Himself. It therefore follows that the reasoning used by the Prophet for drawing conclusions from the Qur'an is itself inspired. That Allah inspires Prophets with reasoning as well as conclusions is expressed in the Qur'an:

*That is Our argument, which We gave to Abraham against his folk (6:83),*

where a whole process of reasoning is inspired to the Prophet Abraham.

To sum up, the Hadith and the Sunnah of the Prophet are demonstrated by the Qur'an to be divinely inspired and to form a permanent part of the message of Allah to man. The interpretation

of the Qur'an by the Prophet is authoritative — the only difference between the injunctions of Allah in the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet is that the direct injunctions of Allah are compulsory whereas the Sunnah, being an "example" is to be performed to the best of one's ability. But deliberate neglect or, as with some of the "modernists," complete denial of the Sunnah is nothing but open contravention of the Holy Book.

### **The truth about Hadith**

It is a sign of the influence of a great deal of loose talk in criticism of Hadith, which has become fashionable in some circles, that the heading given to the report in a newspaper recently was simply "Hadith should not be treated as a source of law." The heading, of course, is blatantly incorrect and misleading, and does not conform to the words reported below; but it is characteristic of a mentality which has been biased by sweeping and ill-informed remarks about the Hadith. The sayings and actions of the Prophet, which include what is known as the Sunnah, or his practice, are both as a matter of faith and as a matter of fact a source of Muslim law, and are so by Divine Command and by the very nature of things. The Qur'an deals extensively with matters of faith and morality, the nature of Allah, the reality of Prophethood, the Day of Judgement, the life of the next world, the principles of worship, or human relationships and the inward attitude man must cultivate towards Allah and his fellowmen; it also lays down civil and criminal laws, but of necessity, since the Qur'an is intended to be easily read, understood and encompassed, detailed application of the law is not its subject, and it is part of Allah's providence that this should be demonstrated by His Prophet. This element in God's message to man, that is to say, its practical application by the Prophet, was clearly asserted in the Qur'an, and understood as an indivisible and vital part of Islam both by the Prophet himself and his Companions. Under Allah's inspiration, the Prophet developed legal ordinances in the light of the Qur'an which were intended by him and accepted by his Companions to be of permanent validity. The *Khulafā' al-Rāshidūn* and those



Companions who survived them were insistent that after the Qur'an, the Sunnah of the Prophet had an obligatory nature in matters of law, and in this they took their authority from the frequent orders of Allah "*obey Allah and obey the Messenger*" in which Allah and His Messenger are indissolubly linked, as also in another, "*he who obeys the Messenger obeys Allah*". It has never been in question at any stage in Islamic history that the Sunnah as recorded in authoritative Ḥadīth is, in development of the legal principles laid down in the Qur'an, an essential source for Islamic legislation.

The butt of criticism, mostly superficial and backed by no solid foundation of knowledge, of some over-enthusiastic purveyors of *Ijtihād* is the authoritative nature of the Ḥadīth which we have in our possession. Very few of these critics, if any of them, have ever cared to make a deep and unbiased study of Ḥadīth literature, much of which is only available in Arabic, especially the critical and analytical works. From one aspect in particular this perfunctory attitude to Ḥadīth is a matter of great sorrow, since the collection and sifting, grading and comparing of Ḥadīth is one of the greatest achievements in scholarship not only of the Muslims but of the whole world. Precisely in order to remove any doubt of authenticity, generation after generation of traditionists subjected Ḥadīth to the most rigorous scrutiny and came to very definite conclusions; what a pity that this wonderful monument of faith and brilliant scholarship should be dismissed in a few glib words by "modernists" who have not taken the trouble even to examine it. No mass of historical material has ever been put to such tests, nor have such meticulous subsidiary sciences such as the biography of the Companions, their Followers and the Followers of their Followers and the other relaters of Ḥadīth, ever been created by any other body of scholars. The whole of Ḥadīth literature is pervaded by a spirit of such fine exactitude that it would seem pedantic — if it were not for the unstained honesty of purpose of the Traditionists — to leave no avenue of research untraversed.

The first of the criticisms which are now commonly being directed against the Ḥadīth is that they were not collected in the time of the Prophet or of the *Khulafā' al-Rāshidūn*, and that during the

period between the utterance or occurrence of their contents and their being recorded in writing there was every chance of their being materially altered. Some have even gone so far as to say that they were not recorded because they were unreliable. That in the earlier stages they were not fully recorded in writing, is true, though it is not true that they were not recorded at all even as regards the Prophet's lifetime, for there is good evidence to show that 'Abdullāh b. 'Amr b. al-'Ās for one, used to write down what he heard from his Master. Other Companions too put their collections of Ḥadīth into writing later in life, particularly Abū Hurayrah and 'Abdullāh b. 'Abbās, two very important sources of Ḥadīth. But in general it can be said that Ḥadīths were only partially and privately recorded in writing in the early stages.

The reasons for this are quite clear and there is nothing mysterious about them. The Arabs' antipathy to writing in this period is well-known, very few of were literate. Huge stores of knowledge of genealogy and poetry preserved in their prodigious memories; some people being able to recite a hundred thousand verses. There were no books in currency among them; even during the Prophet's lifetime the Qur'an did not circulate in book form. The fact that the Prophet's sayings, legal decisions and deeds, were not generally written down is therefore not surprising in the least. There is also evidence that the Prophet disapproved of the general writing of Ḥadīth in his lifetime for fear that they would become mixed up with the Qur'an, which had not yet been fully revealed, and with which the Muslims had yet to become completely familiar. But this is not to say that he disapproved of memorising of, or acting upon Ḥadīth; on the contrary, he insisted on it. The more learned of the Companions, including the *Khulafā' al-Rāshidūn*, spent their time in absorbing thoroughly the explanations, applications, and developments of the Qur'an by the Prophet in addition to their study of the Qur'an itself. When the Prophet had passed away from this world and the age of the Caliphs came, after some deliberation they also came to the conclusion that the written recording of Ḥadīths and publishing them in a book form was inexpedient at this stage, for the same reasons as in the Prophet's lifetime, that the Word of Allah

must be learnt and studied and thoroughly absorbed first, while its practical application by the Prophet can be handed down by word of mouth and by personal example. But if we look at the life and the decisions of the *Khulafā' al-Rāshidūn*, we find that in every case where any matter had not been dealt with explicitly by the Qur'an, they considered it obligatory to discover what was the practice of the Prophet in this situation and made their decisions according to their findings. To contravene the practice of the Prophet on any vital matter was in their eyes equivalent to contravening Islam itself.

The whole of the history of this period shows this valuation of the Prophet's practice, and on this point there is complete unanimity. It is a grave mis-statement to say that 'Umar al-Khattāb was against the relating of Traditions; he was only against collecting them into book form, not that they should not be learnt and known. He was certainly strict as regards accuracy of reporting and always demanded a supporting witness if any Companion recounted something of the Messenger of Allah; when that witness was forthcoming he accepted the Tradition with no further hesitation. In those cases which came up before him he continually had recourse to his own knowledge of the Prophet's rulings, and if he himself did not have this knowledge he appealed to the other Companions; on receiving the required information and after satisfying himself regarding its accuracy, he immediately acted upon it. Indeed, the fact that Hadīths were completely recorded in writing during the lifetime of the Companions was no drawback; they themselves were living models of his practice and treasure-houses of his sayings. They spread over the huge areas which now constituted the Islamic empire, to Kūfah and Basrah in Iraq, to Syria, Palestine, Egypt and Khurāsān. Here they were surrounded by eager pupils both Arab and non-Arab, thirsting to hear about their revered Prophet from those who had seen and lived with him. Some of these pupils, who are known as the Followers of the Companions (*Ṭabī'ūn*), became renowned all over the Islamic world for their learning in the Qur'an and the Sunnah; for their correct reporting and understanding of Hadīth, and for their piety and purity of life. Such were Hasan Basrī, the associate of the companions 'Imrān b. Husayn and Anas b. Mālīk

in Basrah; Alqama and Aṣwad, the repositories of the vast learning of 'Abdullāh b. Mas'ūd in Kūfah, who were also the pupils of 'Umar and 'Ā'ishah; Sa'īd b. Musaiyib, the pupil of Abū Hurayrah and Taus, Mujāhid, 'Aṭā' b. Abī Rabah and others; Nāfi', the pupil of 'Ā'ishah, and many others whose honesty and trustworthiness are unquestioned. Here it is important to note that 'Ā'ishah and Abū Hurayrah lived up to between 50 and 60 A.H., 'Abdullāh b. 'Abbās and 'Abdullāh b. 'Umar to around 70 A.H., Abū Sa'īd Khudrī to between 70 and 80 A.H. and Anas b. Mālik to 90 A.H. This is to say that in the second half of the first century of the Hijrah it was still possible to hear a great store of Ḥadīth from those who had seen or heard them directly from the Messenger of Allah himself.

Nearly all the famous *Tābi'ūn* we have mentioned just now, lived up to dates between 90 and 120 A.H., which means up to this time the collections of Ḥadīth related by these perfectly reliable reporters were available to all who wished to take them. Before the first quarter of the second century (100-125 A.H.) collections in book form were still not current, and although many *Tābi'ūn* had their private written collections, the main basis of teaching was verbal, as was the fashion during this era when knowledge even if written was always committed to memory. It was at this time that the first large-scale collections in book form began to be made, those by Ibn Jurayj, Mālik, Sufyān Thawrī, Ma'mar b. Rashīd and others, all pupils of the *Tābi'ūn*. The idea that much time elapsed between the original hearing and final recording in book form of Ḥadīth as would make them unreliable is found to be completely unfounded when their history as given above is attentively considered, particularly with regard to these early collections, almost all the contents of which found their way into the later collections of al-Bukhārī etc., a century later. But the principle is also established that those Ḥadīths recounted by the well-known and reliable *Tābi'ūn* whether collected into book form or not were available from the recounters themselves up to the first quarter of the second century of the Hijrah, and it only requires two or three successive trustworthy scholars of Ḥadīth to convey them to al-Bukhārī and his contemporaries. It is also necessary to mention that between the earliest published

compilations and al-Bukhārī's time there were other large classified collections of great importance such as that of 'Abdur Razāq (died shortly after 200 A.H.), the pupil of Ibn Jurayj, Sufyān Thawrī, Ma'mar b. Rashīd and Mālik, the earlier collectors. The question arised as to what were these unreliable, wrong or concocted Hadīth of which so much fuss is being made by ill-informed critics today?

It is not true to state that untrustworthy traditions regarding the Messenger of Allah existed to any noteworthy extent during the main portion of the era of the *Khulafā' al-Rāshidūn*. It was only when the Schismatics began to appear such as the Khārijīs, and the dynastic clashes of the Banū Umayyah, Banū 'Abbās and Banū Hāshim convulsed the Ummah, and particularly after the martyrdom of Imam Husayn and his family at Karbalā', that some partisans had recourse to distorting or inventing Hadīth to justify their claims. But it was never the real scholars of traditions who related these incorrect reports, nor had they any purpose in doing so; unreliable Traditions were purveyed by unreliable people, the partisans, popular preachers, story-tellers and so on, and have not escaped the eagle eyes of the very critical *Muhaddithūn*. The solid body of recognised Hadīth which forms the basis of Muslim Law can be found in Mālik as well as in the decisions of Abū Hanīfah and the later Imams. If there are differences of opinion on any important point it is almost always where that difference already existed among the companions. What is remarkable about Muslim law based on the Qur'an and Sunnah as presented by Abū Hanīfah and Mālik, for instance, is not the differences in detail but the extraordinary agreement in its main structure, which proves that there was an agreed corpus of Sunnah which was common to both schools of thought. It is a common fallacy to speak of the accepted books of traditions such as al-Bukhārī, Muslim, al-Tirmidhī, etc., as if they themselves constitute the source of Islamic *Fiqh*. They are certainly adduced as authorities in later judicial controversy, but it is often forgotten that the whole fabric of *Fiqh* was erected before these traditionists were even born. Abū Hanīfah himself was born in 80 A.H. when some of the other Companions of the Prophet were still alive, and he was the pupil of some of the famous *Tābi'ūn* we have mentioned above, particularly

'Atā' b. Abī Rabah in Makkah. The body of traditions used by Abū Hanīfah and Mālik were fresh from the *Tābi'ūn* and unsullied by partisan politics and imaginative interpolations, which in any case affected traditions treating with law very little. These traditions are present in the later collections, but were used by Abū Hanīfah one hundred years earlier.

The statement reported by the biographers of Imam al-Bukhārī that he selected 7,000 Hadīths out of 600,000 is being put to much use by the detractors of Hadīth to attempt to show that the majority are unreliable. This statement was made to extol his industry and discrimination, but from the point of view of the history of Hadīth it is necessary to go more deeply into the matter and avoid rash conclusions which do not conform to reality. In citing this bare statement, the impression is given that in al-Bukhārī's time there was a vast, unclassified mass of every kind of tradition, true and false, floating all over the then Islamic empire, and that he suddenly appeared on the scene, separated the true from the false, and was only able to find 7,000 out of 600,000. The real facts are nothing resembling this at all. Criticism and scrutiny of Hadīth was being done from the very beginning, even in the time of the Companions and their Followers, and there had always been a central core of unquestionable true Hadīth with the earnest, sincere and pious scholars. For instance, the comments of Muḥammad b. Hasan, the renowned pupil of Abū Hanīfah, on Mālik's book of Hadīth, the *Muwatta'*, show that out of more than a thousand traditions of the Messenger of Allah and the Companions quoted by Mālik, Abū Hanīfah only differed with about eighty and even then not regarding their authenticity, but preferring a different ruling. The mischief of fabricating or distorting Hadīth was begun, during the time of the political dissension between the Banū Hāshim and the Umayyads, and particularly after the massacre of Karbalā', when unprecedented passions were roused. But these unreliable traditions circulated among the leading partisans of these two parties and were used to prospective supporters; the really learned were well aware of this and such dishonest tampering with the true Sunnah was clearly denounced by them, and the relators of such traditions singled out

and condemned.

A study of the comments of traditionists on such fabricators and the rejection of their claims to credibility show this plainly, for instance, al-Sha'bī, one of the leading *Ṭābi'ūn* in knowledge of tradition and law, roundly condemns various people who related much partisan reports attributing them wrongly to 'Alī. This kind of fabrication had currency among the ignorant and those who had special interest, not among the scholars.

A second breeding-ground for incorrect and exaggerated traditions were the public preachers and story-tellers, who are prone to this weakness to the present day. The books of the biographies of the reporters of traditions are full of condemnations of people of this type, and their effusions, though gaining currency among the unlettered, were never accepted by the learned. Apart from these two main sources of falsification, there were other unreliable *Ḥadīths* which were due to mere human weakness, such as forgetting, mixing-up, exaggeration, ascribing statements of the Companions to the Prophet himself and so on. The whole science of the traditionists was brought to bear on the elimination of such weak reports, and by an amazingly thorough system of analysis and comparison and minute checking, these defects have been brought to light and carefully classified.

The immense research which has gone into the study of *Ḥadīth* cannot be imagined by simply reading the bare translation of one of the well-known compilations. To know something of what the Muslim traditionists have achieved, one has to go through such comparative studies of *Ḥadīth* such as 'Asqalānī's commentary on al-Bukhārī, where all the ramifications of the variants of a particular *Ḥadīth* are traced meticulously. After making such a study the only honest conclusion one can reach is that it is difficult if not impossible to arrive at anything but the same conclusions as these great Muslim religious scholars. With regard to the statement regarding al-Bukhārī's selection of *Ḥadīth*, it is also necessary to understand that in the language of traditionists, all the variants of a single *Ḥadīth* are counted as a separate *Ḥadīth*, or an identical *Ḥadīth* related by two or more different persons. For instance, the famous *Ḥadīth* reported

by 'Umar, "actions are judged by intentions," is related from 700 different authorities. In the terminology of the traditionists, these are counted as 700 Ḥadīths. Thus the large number of Ḥadīth mentioned are not actually all different, but contain many slight variations of a single Ḥadīth.

In sum, this statement regarding al-Bukhārī's discrimination only amounts to say that he took the trouble to study the whole of the Ḥadīths, both reliable and unreliable, which existed written or unwritten in his day. But it should not be imagined that he was the first to determine the true from the false; a generally agreed body of good and fair traditions was already in existence with the earlier traditionists. Al-Bukhārī added his own unparalleled acumen to make a final examination and compiled a definitive selection of those Ḥadīths which possessed the very best authority. Those who lightly challenge the authority of such compilations should be well aware of what they are doing; it requires a person of exceptional industry and intelligence even to reach to the level of a pupil of these great *Muhaddithūn*. To surpass them would require something more than the superficial and biased minds of today, which have not shown themselves capable of any constructive work in the religious field up to the present.

We come now to a very crucial matter. It is stated that the Ḥadīth should be re-examined on a new basis and with a view to the changed environment. No one has yet given the least inkling of what this basis is to be, except perhaps that it will be the arbitrary fancies of the re-examiners. We have to learn what al-Bukhārī's basis is, let alone working out a new one. But what constitutes exactly this changed environment? We must be very clear about what has changed and what has not. The real change in the modern world has taken place in the physical realm through the inventions of machines and scientific apparatus, and has affected particularly communications, travel, the publication of books and disseminating of information, availability of mass-produced books and labour-saving devices. But the spiritual and moral nature of man has not changed, nor indeed, has his basic physical nature; he still has to eat, sleep, wash, relieve himself, marry and bring up children, find



shelter, work for his bread and preserve a family and community life. The colours of the picture have changed but the outline is the same.

Any amendments in Muslim law which are necessitated by the inevitable changes of the machine age are perfectly justified. But there is another type of change which is always lurking consciously or subconsciously in the minds of some of the "modernists", and this is the change in habits due to foreign domination, not physical but cultural domination. Many of these habits, both of thought and action, are not inevitable at all, still less desirable, and are simply the result of blind conformity. Much of the criticism and scepticism directed towards religion today is not in the least genuine but simply a western habit of thought. Most, if not all, of the modern critics of Hadīth among Muslims have not exercised any constructive or original thought on the question, but borrow the criticism of western writers and use their arguments.

Western detractors of Hadīth can be divided into two main categories: sceptic rationalists, and missionaries. All of them have the characteristics of one or both of these categories in various proportions. There is one attribute which is common to both of them; they are unable to conceive of a Revealed Law. Christianity in its present form is based on the rejection of the Jewish Law, which was effected shortly after Jesus' removal from this world, in the time of his disciples. This rejection has moulded the mentality of the West so that they now have great difficulty in accepting even the possibility of a law laid down under Divine Inspiration. So the first reason for their criticism of Hadīth is an inherent defect of mind. As far as the sceptic rationalists are concerned they do not believe in revealed religion at all, and their criticism starts off with this basic prejudgement. With an inherited warped mentality and a disbelief in the honesty and good intentions of man, they naturally assume that what they cannot understand must have been invented, and use all kinds of specious and unscientific arguments to attempt to prove it. Their attitude to Islam, in fact to all revealed religions, is that of a disbeliever; it is obvious that for a Muslim to adopt their attitude or make use of their very poorly founded arguments is absurd and self-

contradictory.

The second category of critics are the missionaries or inspired by the missionary spirit; their intention from the beginning is to denigrate Islam by any method that comes to hand. All weapons, honest and dishonest, rational and irrational, virtuous and vicious are allowable in their view. To expect them to make a scholarly and impartial study of any branch of Islam would be sheer gullibility. Some of the books regarding Hadīth published from European universities are written precisely in this spirit.

It can be imagined that any Muslim who bases his knowledge of Hadīth on such works can know precisely nil, or rather a minus quantity, regarding the subject. If the basis of Hadīth criticism or the criticism of any branch of Islam is to be an outlook based on the borrowed conceptions and way of life of the West then it has no validity at all and must be rejected outright. Subservience to a civilization which happens to be passing through a temporary phase of material prosperity and power can have no place in the religion of Islam. Genuine research and reform which are not coloured by the spirit of mere imitation but based on the true faith and directed to the real progress of Islam are quite another thing. To be a genuine Muslim reformer, a person should have a burning faith, the love of Allah and His Messenger, and intimate personal experience of the spiritual and devotional as well as the practical and institutional aspects of Islam.

# SUNNAH — THE FACTUAL EMBODIMENT OF REVELATION

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S. M. YUSUF

## The Sunnah and the *Kitāb*

The Prophet came with a mission. This mission, under the Divine guidance, took a definite form known as the Sunnah or the Sunnah of the Prophet of God. The Divine guidance, which came verbally in the form of Qur'anic Revelation, provided a kind of necessary background foundation for the Sunnah. Although, therefore, difference can be made between the Qur'an and the Sunnah, the two cannot be fundamentally divorced from one another. For, the Sunnah is a, more or less, concrete implementation of the Divine will.<sup>1</sup> The tangible *form*, the factual embodiment, has every claim upon our attention and may not be neglected when we try to understand the spirit or the value-content of Islam. This shift in emphasis from bare Book *independently* of the Sunnah to the Sunnah with *reference* to the Book makes all the difference in the understanding of the development of legal practice and theory in Islam. Further, it also makes a vital difference in our approach towards the problem of

*Ijtihād* in relation to the situations arising out of the complexities of the present-day modern life.

In justification of the above position we have to turn first to Revelation (*naql*) and then to simple natural wisdom (*'aql*).

## Revelation

In the context of the mission of the prophets the Qur'an speaks on eight occasions of the *Kitāb* in conjunction with the *Hikmah*; on the ninth occasion *Āyāt Allāh* is substituted for *al-kitāb* together with *al-hikmah*.<sup>2</sup> Now *hikmah* signifies propriety of judgment as manifested and embodied in the propriety of conduct.<sup>3</sup> Clearly, *hikmah* is the primary trait of *nubuwwah* i.e., the prophets were concerned with the establishment and perpetuation of propriety in 'veritable modes of behaviour.' Even the efforts of a prophet with a book are directed essentially to the same veritable modes of behaviour — the *hikmah* in action. In this latter case the Book is necessarily embodied in the *hikmah*; there is no question of the *hikmah* being turned into a mere ephemeral accident of the Book. The importance of the Book lies in the fact that it helps in stabilising the *hikmah* and ensuring sanctity and purity for the same. In other words, *al-kitāb wa'l-hikmah* represents an organic whole; the *kitāb* subsists not in the leaves 'between the two covers' nor in the folds of the memory of the 'readers' (*qurrā'*) but in the coveted forms of the *hikmah* which in its turn is sustained by the supreme memorable words of God. The progression from the *Kitāb* to the *Hikmah* is essential; to tear the one from the other is to destroy the common entity of both. The *Hikmah* springs from the Book and the Book grows into the *Hikmah*. The root is important for the sake of the flower and the fruit; anyone who would not have the entire plant with the natural shape, colour, odour and taste of its foliage and product would just kill the root by having only the root. Perhaps I need not labour the point that the *Hikmah* is by common agreement to be equated fully with the Sunnah — the pattern of behaviour according to the design of the Book.

## 'Aql

The simple natural wisdom of man would also regard the concrete form as crucial in the matter of heavenly guidance. So far as the values are concerned they belong to the realm of *ma'rūf* i.e., intuitive knowledge of good and evil. It is only in determining the particular form of virtue in specified circumstances that man by himself would feel somewhat perplexed and helpless. And it is just at the point where man's natural wisdom wavers and feels at a loss to make a definite choice — it is just there that the choice of Allah is made known to him in the form of actual practice fostered under the aegis of a prophet in intimate communion with Himself. Now the actual practice of virtue with all the details of form and manner represents the real outside help to man in his predicament, which is to devise form and shape for the practice of intuitively known values in actual life. It is but due that the faithful should treasure and stick unflinchingly to the formalities of the Sunnah because it is the forms of virtue that constitute the real art of religion. When we admire a piece of art — a particular design of dress, for example — do we not actually concentrate upon the form which the artist has succeeded in devising for the abstract values of beauty and elegance? The moment one turns one's gaze away from the ensemble of form one is left with a mere piece of cloth, which one cannot make any use of unless one finds some form for it. Thus the discarding of 'form' only serves to force upon attention the importance of it. And then comes the realisation that it is really the form that baffles the intellect of man.

To make little of form is to make little of religion itself by contenting merely with intuition. And let us remember that intuition receives flashes of abstract values only — a realm in which it is, no doubt, far more reliable than rational thought. But as soon as it comes to actual practice calling for a definite choice of form, the impudence of both the intuition and the rational thought is fully exposed. Then there appear only two alternatives: either to acknowledge in all humbleness that the choice of form is to be determined by the Sunnah, i.e., the example of a Divinely guided person or to resort to bullying and assert that the forms are just

inconsequential. The former is the way of religion, the latter the way of no-religion. Naturalism, Humanism and Liberalism are essentially non-religious attitudes not because they deny any moral values of life but just because they discount the specific forms of virtue as enjoined by religion. Very soon, however, these non-religious attitudes turn anti-religious when they develop intolerance of religious forms. That is to say, while demanding of religion the tolerance of any form of virtue whatsoever, non-religion tends to regard the particular form of religion as anathema to itself. Why? This is so because the specific forms of religion have their sanction in *tawqīf* i.e., the authoritative teaching of God as distinct from the inward perception of man. This element of *tawqīf* in regard to actual form is the real distinction of religion and any attack on it is an attack on religion itself. It was on the same account that the 'Natural (*nature* excluding *tawqīf*) Religion' of the Mu'tazilah fell into disrepute. And the failure of philosophy in all the ages to serve the mass of mankind in regard to the promotion of practical virtue on any scale comparable to that of religion is also to be explained by the absence of the self-same *tawqīf* in respect of forms.

### Shāh Walīyullāh on the importance of 'form'

The best exposition of the above viewpoint is to be found in Shāh Walīyullāh's *Hujjah*. According to him, every act prescribed by the Sunnah (with the *Kitāb* at the back of it) is a definite, invariable form (*shabḥ, qālab, mazīnnah*) permeated with a spirit or general abstract idea or high moral consideration (*rūḥ, aṣl, maslahah*). The understanding and appreciation of the latter, which is the subject of the "*ilm aṣrār al-sharī'ah*", far from promoting any contempt for the former, should only compel conservation and strict adherence to it. The relationship between the two is hard, fast and essential: the form is the ideal representation (*shukḥūs mathālīyyah*) and the perfect actualisation (*wujūd shabāḥī*) of the spirit — the one denotes, stands for, and symbolises, the other like the word and the idea, the script and the spoken word, and the picture and the object.<sup>4</sup> So far as the value is concerned, it is ingrained in human nature; there is no grace

of God (*lutf*) in revealing the same through a prophet. It is only the prescription through Sunnah of the dimensions and the particulars (*maqādir*) of the acts containing, embodying as well as preserving and promoting the values which constitutes the real 'grace'.<sup>5</sup> And it is the height of folly on the part of man to belittle or cast away this very distinctive element of grace from the solid structure of practical religion.

### *Maṣlahah distinguished from 'Illah*

Further, Shāh Walīyullāh makes a very subtle distinction of high import between *maṣlahah* i.e., abstract consideration of value and '*illah*' i.e., the effective cause or the accountable condition of judgment. For example, a traveller on journey is privileged not to keep the fast. In this case consideration for convenience and avoidance of extra hardship represents the value content of the judgment, which, however, should not be confused with the effective cause or the accountable condition of it, namely, the journey. There can be no doubt about the essential primacy of the value content but that only enhances the quality of an act; the act itself is determined and takes cognisable shape from the conditions specified for it. Now the all-important conclusion resulting from the above is that analogy is to be based on '*illah*' and not on *maṣlahah* — in the above example, on the concrete circumstance of journey and not on the consideration for the avoidance of extra hardship. The value content is recognised only in one prescribed form just as the human spirit is recognisable only in the human form. One form is not as good as the other: there is to be no extension of analogy in regard to forms. For fulfilment of duty, the prayer has to be in just one prescribed form: communion with Allah in any other form is not enough. This is because the value content is unmeasurable and liable to be mistaken (*al-khafī al-mushtabah*); it has to be regulated and defined with suitable external formal conditions such as are clearly understood and palpably seen by the common people and would incontestably allow for an easy check and simple process of retribution.<sup>6</sup> Finally, retribution depends primarily upon the formalities of an act; without

the completion of formalities in the ordained manner the act cannot be taken into account at all. It is only when the act is there in appropriate form and shape that a probe can be made into the spirit behind it with a view to assessing the quality of the act. The fact that the spirit is susceptible of simulation and difficult of apprehension in its hide-out deep into the recesses of the heart only serves to bring out the point made above in regard to the formalities being the accountable test of punishment and reward.

That is, of course, the generally accepted view among all the religious persuasions: the learned among them are distinguished by an insight into the absolute, inseparable and divinely ordained relationship between the *maṣlahah* or the value content of an act and the form prescribed for the same through the Sunnah; the rest are just content with performance on the pattern of the Sunnah. But during various periods of history there has been a minority of intellectuals and visionaries who, once they attained to a knowledge of the *maṣlahah* behind the religious ordinances, began to work for the discarding of the prescribed forms as inconsequential. According to them the form was like a shell; it had to be broken and the kernel (i.e., value) taken out of it. But, to turn the same simile the other way, the kernel requires for its growth and protection a shell of a distinct type, which would not allow even of the slightest variation. The intellectuals and the visionaries fail to appreciate that it requires the Omniscience of Allah to devise the appropriate form for the growth and preservation of ingrained values, which cannot but deteriorate and lose their effectiveness without it. Any other form devised by human reason is bound to lack perfection. Hence infidelity to *more* Sunnah can only mean splendid chaos — a sort of Bohemian libertinism in spiritual and moral values. In the words of Shāh Walīyullāh,

There is no gainsaying the fact that unconformity to the prescribed formal ways (*manāḥij*) is a great source of evil in as much as it involves fault-finding with the divinely-guided Sunnah, the opening of the door of sin, double-dealing with the general body of Muslims and harming the clan, the town and the entire community.<sup>7</sup>



Among the intellectuals who mocked at the supreme importance of the Sunnah forms were the well-meaning Mu'tazilah and the impudently wise philosophers. Their attitude to *tawqif* has already been hinted at above. The Sufi visionaries had even more obvious excuse for showing contempt for everything pertaining to sobriety and orderliness in actual life on mundane earth. All these deviations from the general consensus soon developed into monstrosities and had to be curbed by force — not only the force of the government in power but also the pressure of the general will of the community. The danger to public life and morality resulting from the attempts to play with 'forms' is poignantly brought out towards the end of the story of Absāl and Salāmān (in Ibn Tufayl's *Hayy bin Yaqzān*). It was this disillusionment that gave rise to the later view that philosophy should be confined to the select few as evidenced by the spate of works entitled "*al-madnūn bihi 'alā ghayri ahlihi*".

### The challenge of modernity

In our own day the so-called modernity, the protagonists of which keep a sinister silence on its full and proper definition, is but the same old challenge to the Sunnah in a new garb with the difference that this time it is accompanied by a fanfare of scientific achievement and industrial and technological power. Anyway, modernity is presented as a self-evident inescapable fact destined to reign supreme in the mid-twentieth century. In the circumstances it would appear to be a generous concession indeed that religion is allowed to survive: only it is called upon to adjust itself to the new demands of the age. The method suggested for such adjustment is no other than sloughing off the old forms and revaluing the values arbitrarily according to the exigencies of modernity itself. No surprise that the brunt of the attack is directed at the Sunnah — the repository of forms and institutions. It makes little difference if the allegiance to the Sunnah is retained so long as it is regarded as a mere carton package for graded values. Quite unwittingly a Christian missionary adviser on 'modern Islam' once let the cat out of the bag when he complained with amusing, rather exasperating, pathos that the

Muslims were more devoted to Islam than to Allah! Modernity is at war with the dimensional Islam — its practices and institutions. If only the sanctity of such practices as cutting the hand of the thief and stoning the married adulterer is undermined, a general inward abhorrence of theft and adultery can conveniently be tolerated.

The Turks may remain staunch Muslims with the permission of modernity only if the state is secular and the *Shari'ah* replaced with a conglomeration of Swiss and other codes. To clinch the issue, let us only ask ourselves the simple question whether our sense of abhorrence at theft and adultery has increased or decreased since the giving up of the Sunnah form of punishment designed to foster the same.

A typical example of the adjustment of Islam to modernity is provided by what has come to be known as the *Fatwā* of Tunis (by al-Shaykh Muḥammad al-Mahīrī, ex-Muftī of Safāqis dated the 19th February, 1960).<sup>8</sup> Basically, the argument runs thus: attach yourself only to the value of sparing extra hardship as deduced from the privilege of the traveller not to keep the fast, then apply the value quite widely in the case of industrial and other workers until the institution of fasting rests at the sweet will of those willing and allowed to declare themselves as idlers. It is highly significant, indeed, that Shāh Walīyullāh repeatedly proffers the self-same example in order to mark the difference between *maslahah* and 'illah and to forewarn against the attempts to writhe out of the concrete form of the Sunnah and run after the ethereal spirit of the Book. Shāh Walīyullāh's vision was almost prophetic in his grasp of the mentality of the modernists in Islam. If hard work (e.g., agriculture and smithery) were compared to the hardship of the journey, then, declares Shāh Walīyullāh, obedience to God would be nullified. And if every fatigue and hardship (*ta'b*, *'inā'*) were considered as harmful (*hārij*) and worthy of elimination then there would be no test at all of submission to the Will of God.<sup>9</sup>

As a matter of fact, Shah Walīyullāh has just taken the cue from al-Shāfi'ī. It is well-known that the latter was almost vehement in his denunciation of *al-Istihsān*. He declared:

Whoever indulges in *Istihsān* sets himself up as Lawgiver.

This categorical declaration is corroborated and explained by al-Sha'bi in the words:

Certainly, if you took to comparisons (of value) you would be making the lawful unlawful and the unlawful lawful".<sup>10</sup>

Now this vehemence, rather virulence, on the part of a disciplined academician like al-Shāfi'ī can only be understood in the context of value-hunt implied in *Istihsān* and its consequences for the integrity of the Sunnah. It represents an inherent failing of the human intellect and an old recurring danger to the supremacy of the *Shari'ah*.

In conclusion, it will be appreciated that the history of the development of jurisprudence in Islam is characterised by an honest search for the Sunnah, which is to be contrasted with the modernist exasperation with the Sunnah. The Muslim jurists were eager to make life conform to Islam while the modernist is at pains to make Islam conform to modernity. The moment the structure of the Sunnah topples down, Islam with its pure spirit and much-vaunted values will be dead and buried under the debris.

## NOTES

1. Cf. al-Shāfi'ī, *al-Risālah*, ed. Ahmad Shākir, Art.257:

“وَسِنَّةُ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ مُبْهِنَةٌ عَنْ اللَّهِ مَعْنَى مَا أَرَادَ . . .”

2. Cf. *Ibid.*, Art.245-257. Refer the Qur'an, 3:81; 2:129; 2:151; 2:231; 3:48; 5:110; 4:54; 4:113 and 33:34.

The following verses may also be borne in mind where *al-hikmah* is almost defined by acts of virtue: 31:12; 17:23, 39.

The verse 4:61 may also be regarded as equivalent to "*al-kitāb wa'l hikmah*".

3. See *Tafsīr al-Khāzin* under the verses quoted in Note 2 particularly 31:12 where *al-hikmah* is best defined as:

“العلم والعمل به ولا يستي الرجل حكيما حتى يجمعهما”

[*Khāzin* (Cairo 1328 A.H.), III; 440].

In this respect, the concomitant, *al-kitāb wa'l-hikmah* is to be compared with "*āmanū wa'amilū al-sālihāt*". The relationship between the good faith and the good conduct has been one of the most vexed problems in theology. However, in spite of all ingenuity, the attempt to isolate the one from the other has proved to be far from convincing. The point is that good faith can only be seen and vouched for through specific forms of good conduct.

Shāh Walīyullāh, *Hujjah* (Cairo 1352 A.H.), I:92, bāb *Asbāb al-Mu'akhadah 'alā al-Manāhij*.

5. *Ibid.*, I:129.

6. *Ibid.*, I:130 and 87.

7. *Ibid.*, I:92.

8. See the text thereof in *Die Welt des Islams*, N.S. vol.VII, pp.54-57.

9. Shāh Walīyullāh, *op. cit.*, I:94 and 103-4.

10. *Ibid.*, I:121, *Man Asbāb al-Tahrif al-Istihāsān* and p.147, para.2.

# SOCIAL CHANGE AND EARLY SUNNAH

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FAZLUR RAHMAN

## The problem before us

When new forces of massive magnitude — socio-economic, cultural-moral or political — occur in or to a society, the fate of that society naturally depends on how far it is able to meet the new challenges creatively. If it can avoid the two extremes of panicking and recoiling upon itself and seeking delusive shelters in the past on the one hand, and sacrificing or compromising its very ideals on the other, and can react to the new forces with self-confidence by necessary assimilation, absorption, rejection and other forms of positive creativity, it will develop a new dimension for its inner aspirations, a new meaning and scope for its ideals. Should it, however, choose, by volition or force of circumstance, the second of the two extremes we have just mentioned and succumb to the new forces, it will obviously undergo a metamorphosis; its being will no longer remain the same and, indeed, it may even perish in the process of transformation and be swallowed up by another scio-

cultural organism. But more surely fatal than this mistake is the one we have mentioned as the first extreme. Should a society begin to live in the past — however sweet its memories — and fail to face the realities of the present squarely — however unpleasant they be, — it must become a fossil; and it is an unalterable law of God that fossils do not survive for long:

*We did them no injustice; it is they who did injustice to themselves* (11:101; 16:33, etc.).

Roughly speaking, for about a century Muslim society has been experiencing the onset, within its fabric, of tremendous forces let loose by what is generally called 'Modernity' whose source has lain in the contemporary West. Certain conscious efforts have been made by Muslim thinkers both in the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent and in the Middle East, particularly around the end of the last century, to meet the new challenges by creative absorption, adjustment, etc. With the rise, however, of independent Muslim states during the past two decades or so and their emancipation from the foreign political domination, these influences of Modernity have naturally been accelerated in pace and momentum. We say 'naturally' because with the all-too-justifiable desire for developing the potential resources on the part of these countries — natural and human — instruments of mass economic production and movement, mass-education, media of mass-communication, etc., are absolutely inescapable. Muslim society has plunged itself into the Industrial Age — if it did not do so, its fate would be sealed. But these vast and massive impacts require a creative response of *equal dimensions* if our society is to progress Islamically. This calls for a relentless process of hard, clear, systematic and synthetic thinking, which is not yet visible in the Muslim World. By and large, and in effect, we are still suffering from intellectual indolence and consequently, for all practical purposes, are experiencing the two extreme attitudes born of this indolence, to which we have just now pointed, viz. (a) a *laissez-faire* attitude towards the new forces which makes us simply drift, and (b) an attitude of escape to the past which may seem emotionally more

satisfying immediately but which is, in fact, the more obviously fatal of the two attitudes.

Fortunately, there are strong guiding lines for us in the early history of the Community when the Qur'anic teaching and the Prophetic Sunnah (the ideal legacy of the Prophetic activity) were creatively elaborated and interpreted to meet the new factors and impacts upon Muslim society into the 'living Sunnah' of the Community. In Chapter 6 we have studied at some length the phenomenon of this developing, moving 'living Sunnah'. This was not just an academic exercise motivated through sheer historical curiosity: if it is historically true, then it is *fraught Ivith meaning for us now, and, indeed, forever*. In the sequel, we shall illustrate the development of this early 'living Sunnah' with concrete examples, endeavouring in each case to show the situational background — the forces that called forth a certain measure — and by pointing out the extent of the newness of the cases we hope to bring out their true magnitude. These illustrations have three objectives in view: (i) they strikingly drive home the reality of the 'living Sunnah'; (ii) they are intended as pointers for future developments; (iii) they constitute a humble suggestion to the '*ulamā*' that if the study of early Hadīth-materials is carried through with constructive purposiveness under the canons of historical criticism and in relation to the historico-sociological background, they take on quite a new meaning. A Hadīth, say, in *al-Muwatta'*, that 'Umar did so-and-so, when read as mere Hadīth, i.e., as an isolated report, remains a blank and yields little; but when one fully comprehends the sociological forces that brought the action about, it becomes meaningful *for us now* and assumes an entirely new dimension.

In what sense does it become meaningful for us now? As a pointer to our future development, as we said in (ii) above. It is of capital importance to realize, however, that a pointer is, by its very nature, generally indicative rather than specifically legislative. The 'living Sunnah' of our early forefathers, therefore, while it has lessons for us as a genuine and successful interpretation of the Qur'an and the Prophetic activity for the early days of the Community, is, in its flesh and blood, absolutely irrepeatable, for

history really never repeats itself so far as societies and their structures are concerned. There is only one sense in which our early history is repeatable — and, indeed, in that sense it must be repeated if we are to live as progressive Muslims at all, viz., just as those generations met their own situation adequately by freely interpreting the Qur'an and Sunnah of the Prophet — by emphasizing the ideal and the principles and re-embodying them in a fresh texture of their own contemporary history — we must perform the same feat for ourselves, with our own effort, for our own contemporary history.

In one way, the following examples have been chosen somewhat at random in the sense that many more examples of the kind exist in books out of which only these *happen* to be given here. But these are as good as any others in illustrating the points outlined above and in establishing our thesis. In another sense, however, these examples are not altogether the results of random choice but have been largely determined by one major consideration which will become apparent to any careful reader. This is the fact that most of the examples have been chosen from 'Umar's legislation and decisions. The reason for this is not far to seek. It was in the time of 'Umar that, due to sudden and vast conquests, big sociological and political problems arose in Madinah itself and in the conquered lands. Sociologically speaking, perhaps the biggest problem was the presence of an immense increase in the numbers of slaves and slave-girls or, rather, bondsmen and bondswomen. The same element in the population, when gradually freed, became so powerful that it contributed directly to the subsequent overthrow of the Umayyad rule. While going through the *Muwatta'* of Mālik one is impressed with the social legislation of 'Umar, especially with regard to the slave problem, and more especially with regard to the problem of the slave-girls. Secondly, therefore, many of these examples happen to be drawn from the *Muwatta'*.

### Some illustrations:

#### A law of War

1. The practice of the Prophet had been that if a certain tribe did not



surrender peacefully but was reduced after armed conflict, its lands were confiscated and distributed among the Muslim soldiers as part of the booty. This was probably an old law of war. But the Muslims accepted it as the Sunnah of the Prophet, as part of the mechanism of devastating the enemy and rewarding the Muslim fighter and, indeed, this law remained operative in the early small-scale conquests of the Muslims outside Arabia. When, however, Iraq (*Sawād*) and Egypt were conquered and added to the Muslim territory in 'Umar's time, he refused to distribute these massive territories among the Arab soldiers and dispossess the original inhabitants. There was solid opposition against 'Umar's stand even though he was not alone in holding this opinion but several other men of eminence agreed with him. The opposition hardened so much that a kind of crisis developed, but 'Umar remained firm and tried to argue his case on the ground that if Arab soldiers became land-settlers they would cease to be fighters, although his real considerations, as it subsequently turned out, were based on a keen sense of socio-economic justice. One day 'Umar came upon the following verse of the Qur'an which, in a very general way, did support his view and in broad terms embodied his unshakeable faith in justice:

*... And those whoshall come after them shall say: O our Lord! Forgive us and those of our brethren who have preceded us in Faith . . . Verily, Thou art kind, benevolent (59:10).*

This verse most decisively shows that he was motivated by fundamental considerations of socio-economic justice: he refused to concede the distribution of one whole country after another among the Muslim-Arab soldiery to the neglect of the world population and future generations.<sup>1</sup>

But this case reveals certain features of paramount importance in connection with the interpretation of the Qur'an and the Prophet's Sunnah. The Prophet had undoubtedly confiscated the territories that had fallen after a fight. This fact is historically so clear and firm that it is this kind of unambiguous pronouncement or behaviour that later legists term *muhkam* or *mansūs*. The truth, however, is that this hard

and fast distinction between *muhkam* and *mutashābih*, between *nass* and non-*nass* does not exist for the very early generations of Muslims. It is this type of case that has led Joseph Schacht to assert repeatedly in his *Origins of Muhammedan Jurisprudence* that in the early development of *Fiqh* the Qur'an is "introduced invariably at a secondary stage" (e.g. p.224). This is an extraordinary statement to make. But it certainly points to something and this something is that the early generations were not bound by what later came to be called '*nass*' or the letter of the text. This case of 'Umar is a striking case of this kind. What 'Umar and those who agreed with him — and ultimately everyone had to agree — felt most strongly was that the Prophet was acting within a restricted milieu of tribes, that, *therefore, you cannot carry on the same practice where vast territories and whole peoples are involved; otherwise you violate the very principles of justice for which the Prophet had been fighting all his life*. One thing is certain: that although 'Umar obviously departed formally from the Sunnah of the Prophet on a major point, he did so in the interest of implementing the essence of the Prophet's Sunnah. Indeed, there are few men in history who have carried on the mission of the Prophet so creatively, so effectively and so well. But these are the choices and the decisions which every *living* society has to face almost incessantly but particularly at times when massive new factors enter into it.

### Criminal Law

2. It is well known that 'Umar suspended the *Hadd* punishment for theft during a period of acute scarcity of food.

### Social Legislation

3. 'Umar ordered:

Whatever slave-girl gives birth to a child from her master, can neither be sold by him nor given away as a gift nor left as a part of his inheritance. She belongs to her master during his lifetime (i.e. unless she is freed by him), but on his death will become automatically free <sup>2</sup>

We know that a "mother-of-the-child (*umm al-walad*)", as a slave-girl who bore a child was called since early Islamic days, could be sold, given away as a gift and was, of course, on the death of her master, inherited during the lifetime of the Prophet — although this was an old custom of the Arabs, which the Prophet did not forbid because apparently it did not constitute a big social problem. In one respect, however, the slave-girl got a special concession in very early Islam — besides the overall improvement that occurred through Qur'anic legislation and moral exhortation with regard to slaves in general. This is that when she bore a child, she was called "*umm al-walad*" and, as such, given special treatment.

Not until 'Umar's time, however, was a legislative measure taken to ensure that the "mother-of-the-child" could neither be sold nor given away as gift nor yet could she be retained as a slave after the master was dead. At the latter's death, indeed, both she and her offspring must enjoy equal freedom. What had happened since the Prophet's days that a custom even backed by his own 'silent' approval (*Sunnah sukūṭiyah*) had to be legislated against? Obviously, something vitally Islamic was at stake and on closer examination we find that a big problem of social justice had been raised by certain new factors in the society. The great influx of slaves and slave-girls raised many problems. Especially acute was the problem of those slave-girls — whose number was very large — that bore children. If these were bought and sold and given away as gifts, what would be its effect on society? More especially, what would be its effect on children, on their morale and morals? These were the considerations that led 'Umar to put a ban on their sale and indeed, on their slavery after the master's death. So far as the master's life is concerned, since the woman has borne him children, he is assumed to show her great consideration by an almost physical necessity, as it were. 'Umar, therefore, curtailed the 'rights' of slave-owning men and even went against a *Sunnah in order to keep the bases of the Sunnah alive, strong and progressively prosperous*.

For the traditional students of the Hadīth, i.e. '*ulamā*', the above-quoted measure of 'Umar is merely a Hadīth, i.e. a report about a "saying of 'Umar". Since the genuinely historical reports are

not studied with an eye on the historico-sociological background which would make them 'live' before our own eyes, they are read as dead matter, shorn of any meaning *for us now*. May we request our 'ulamā' to study these materials with the necessary and relevant background? We feel certain that once this is done, the whole question of how the Qur'an and the Sunnah are to be interpreted will take on a new meaning for the traditional students of the *madrasah*.

3A. Mālik holds<sup>3</sup> that if a man-slave contracts with his master to purchase his freedom on payment of instalments to his master but dies before completing the instalments, then, if such a "contractual slave (*mukātab*)" has left a "mother-of-the-child" and also children who are too weak to complete the instalments left over by their father and thus earn their own freedom as well as that of the "mother-of-the-child", then the "mother-of-the-child" *must be sold in order to purchase the freedom for the children*.

The really interesting feature of this comment of Mālik is that it is not brought into relation with 'Umar's order banning the sale of the "mothers-of-children". Of course, the case Mālik is discussing may be different from those covered by 'Umar's order; but Mālik does not even mention 'Umar's order, discuss its relevance or otherwise to the case in point and mark out the latter's differential, etc. This is, indeed, a most fundamental and striking feature of our *Fiqh*, that its various parts and legal points and enunciations do not actually tie up with one another to make it a real well-knit system. That is why it has been aptly described as a "discussion on a Muslim's duties" rather than a legal system in the strict sense. Indeed, even a casual student cannot fail to notice this 'atomicity' of *Fiqh* — the, in effect, intellectually unrelated development of almost all of its enunciations. Therefore, rather than being a system, it is a huge mass of atoms, each atom being a kind of a system in itself. Broadly speaking, therefore, *Fiqh* constitutes *materials* for a legal system but is not a legal system itself. We do not, however, deny that *Fiqh* is endowed with a sufficiently definite character which marks it out from other legal systems — this character being the result of its Islamicity — what we deny is that it is a logically

connected, intellectually worked out, and, therefore, a closely enough knit legal system.

4. Connected with (3) above is 'Umar's decision that if a slave is grossly maltreated by his or her master, the state must intervene. Mālik reports that 'Umar ordered the freeing of a slave-girl who had been tortured by her master.<sup>4</sup>

5. 'Umar issued an order with the following statement:

How about men who cohabit with their slave-girls but then neglect them (and subsequently refuse to own children born of these slave-girls on the pretext that they were never sure where these girls had been visiting). For me it is sufficient ground that the master of a slave-girl should admit having cohabited with her that I should declare the child to be his. So either control your slave-girls or let them go.<sup>5</sup>

Just consider the dimensions of the social evil arising from the non-recognition of children by anyone as their father — either the ostensible father or the real one. The problem, however, arose in the first place by the immense number of slave-girls who probably could not even be controlled by their masters. We now understand more fully the significance of (3) above, viz. 'Umar's measure to declare slave-girls with children free and rehabilitate them in society.

### Law of Evidence

6. A man came to 'Umar from Iraq and said, "I have come to you for something which has neither head nor tail (i.e. is as difficult to treat as a vicious circle)." "What is it?" inquired 'Umar. The man said, "In our country (Iraq) false evidence has become rampant." "Is this really so?" asked 'Umar and "yes" was the man's reply. Thereupon 'Umar said: "By God, none shall be imprisoned under Islam except on the evidence of unimpeachable witnesses."<sup>6</sup> The law of evidence in Islam, of course, lays down certain criteria of reliability of witnesses although these are rather formal. But what is of importance here is that an important part of the procedural law is

being given a fresh meaning because of the new situational context that had arisen. It may be objected that this report of Mālik may not be able to stand the test of strict historical criticism for, to begin with, we do not know who this 'man' was that came from Iraq and complained to 'Umar. But our point about the fresh interpretation of laws and investing these with new emphasis and even new meaning in the light of the changing sociological situation remains perfectly valid whether or not the story itself is true and, if true, whether it is true about 'Umar or about somebody else.

7. A slave who, under a contract, was allowed by his master to purchase his freedom by instalments was called a "*mukātab* (a slave contracted-for-freedom)". A man was thought to be under no *legal* compulsion to allow his slave to purchase freedom but this was undoubtedly encouraged by state policies. Actually, the words of the Qur'an:

*And contract them (the slaves) for freedom, if you think they are any good (24:33).*

hardly admit of any doubt as to the uncompromising intention of the Qur'an to free slaves and abolish slavery. But with the influx of a large number of slaves — under the war ethics of those days — the intention of the Qur'an could not be immediately carried out and subsequently this became one of those major points on which the Qur'anic ideals were thwarted by the Community at large. The words of the Qur'an, "If you think they are any good" are not a restriction on freeing of slaves. All that they mean is that if a slave cannot earn to purchase his freedom then he cannot be expected to stand on his own feet, when set free and even when set free, he will be a slave.

Once, however, a slave had contracted for freedom the question arose whether a slave, on showing good cause, could pay all his instalments at once — if he could earn so much and hence offered to do so — and free himself without going through the entire period of the instalments. Mālik says:

Furāfīṣah [Porphyrius (?) apparently a Graeco-Syrian name] b. 'Umayr, the Hanafite [this has no reference to the famous school of Islamic law but to a tribe] had a *mukātab* who proposed to the former that he accept from the latter all the sums of the *mukātabah*-contract at once (because the slave had grounds for getting freedom early). Furāfīṣah refused the offer. The *mukātab* came to the Umawī Marwān, then governor of Madīnah, and petitioned to him. Marwān called Furāfīṣah and asked him to accept the offer but the latter refused again. Marwān then ordered that the contract money should be taken from the slave and put in the public treasury, while to the slave he said: "Go! you are a free man." When Furāfīṣah saw this, he took the money.<sup>7</sup>

Commenting upon this Mālik says:

Therefore, our established practice [*al-amr*; we have pointed out before, however, that Mālik uses the terms '*al-amr*', '*al-'amal*', '*al-sunnah*', and '*al-amr al-mujtama'* '*alayhi*' as equivalent terms for the practice or Sunnah at Madīnah] is that when his special circumstances enable a *mukātab* to pay up all his dues, even before they are due, it is permitted to him to do so and his master may not refuse . . .

We have cited this case in order to make two points. First, along with the previously cited examples, it brings out clearly the measures that were taken by the state-authorities to enfranchise the slaves. Secondly, this illustration forces vividly upon our attention the fact, oft-repeated previously, that Sunnah, i.e., the living practice of the Community, is not just the work of the Prophet as the post-Shāfi'ī *Fiqh*-doctrine claims, but is the result of the progressive thought — and decision-making activity of the Muslims. Here Marwān b. al-Hakam's decision is part of the practice or Sunnah according to Mālik. Exactly the same is true of the concept of Sunnah in al-Awzā'ī, the younger contemporary of Mālik in Syria. The Iraqi school started with the same living tradition but gradually exhibited greater freedom in legal ratiocination and depended less on actual decisions taken in the past. About the middle of the second century, however, this free thought began more and more to take the form of traditions (Hadīth). But the Iraqi Hadīth is, at bottom, no

less regional than the Madīnese 'Sunnah or the 'practice' of al-Awzā'ī.

## Conclusion

The illustrations given above — and a host of other examples many of which we have not given and some of which we have provided in the previous chapters — demonstrate beyond any shadow of doubt that our earliest generations looked upon the teaching of the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet not as something static but essentially as something that moves through different social forms and moves creatively. Islam is the name of certain norms and ideals which are to be progressively realized through different social phenomena and set-ups. Indeed, Islam, understood properly, ever seeks new and fresh forms for self-realization and finds these forms. Social institutions are one of the most important sectors of the Islamic activity and expression. Social institutions, therefore, must become proper vehicles for the carriage and dispensation of Islamic values — of social justice and creativity, etc. This is the clear lesson that we learn from the early development of the Sunnah.

We do not wish to be misunderstood. We especially and carefully reject that vagrant attitude of empty liberalism or negative spiritualism that seeks to drive a wedge between the form and the essence and says that what matters is the essence and that the form is at best its cumbersome companion. We say that the form and the essence are coevals, inter-dependent and each necessary and desirable. But we know that even forms have a way of changing and yet remaining the same. What is injurious to a living faith and a living society is not forms but formalism. 'Umar changed the form of the Prophet's Sunnah of War in certain fundamental aspects and yet that very Prophet's Sunnah was all the more prosperous because of this change. The Muslims, indeed, changed the Qur'anic law of evidence and, instead of insisting on two witnesses, began deciding cases on the basis of one witness and an oath. They knew that what the Qur'an was after, was to establish justice and not two witnesses. If now we can have a recorded self-confession (provided its



authenticity is otherwise established beyond doubt), may we not even dispense with conventional modes of evidence in a given case?

But these examples are vital and potent enough to raise other and much bigger issues to which we must give constructive and decisive replies. In the world, as it stands constituted today, is it or is it not among our paramount duties to create the best moral and material conditions for the coming generations? If it is, can we honestly allow the reckless multiplication of population whom we can neither properly nourish nor educate? Does it make good Islamic sense? And if it is the absolutely inalienable 'right' of a Muslim to procreate in season and out of season, can we accept the alternate but desperate course of strict regimentation of labour? The first course is easier, but if not adopted today, tomorrow the choice will no longer be ours and the other alternative will simply impose itself upon us. Again, if we adopt the first course, how much raising of the standard of living do we want before relaxing controls, is another question. But all these are problems that must be answered *now*; and they must be answered from the depths of the Islamic conscience, not from a mimicry of the past. If the right and successful answer emerges now from the Islamic conscience, therein shall live the Sunnah of the Prophet.

## NOTES

1. Abu Yūsuf, *Kitāb al-Kharāj* (Cairo 1302 A.H.), p.20.
2. Mālik, *al-Muwatta'* (Cairo 1370 A.H./1951), II: 776.
3. *Ibid.*, p.798.
4. *Ibid.*, p.776.
5. *Ibid.*, pp.742-3; passage translated here is at the top of p.743.
6. *Ibid.*, p.720.
7. *Ibid.*, p.800.

# 10

## SOCIAL AND CULTURAL REALITIES OF THE SUNNAH

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MUHAMMAD ASAD

Many reform proposals have been advanced during the last decades, and many spiritual doctors have tried to devise a patent medicine for the sick body of Islam. But, until now, all was in vain, because all those clever doctors — at least those who get a hearing today — invariably forgot to prescribe along with their medicines, tonics and elixirs the natural *diet* on which the early development of the patient had been based. This diet, the only one which the body of Islam, sound or sick, can positively accept and assimilate, is the Sunnah of our Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him). The Sunnah is the key to the understanding of the Islamic rise more than fourteen centuries ago; and why should it not be a key to the understanding of our present degeneration? Observance of the Sunnah is synonymous with Islamic existence and progress. Neglect of the Sunnah is synonymous with decomposition and decay of Islam. The Sunnah was the iron framework of the House of Islam; and if you remove the framework from a building, can you be surprised if it breaks down like a house of cards?

This simple truth, almost unanimously accepted by all learned men throughout Islamic history, is — we know it well — most unpopular today for reasons connected with the ever growing influence of Western civilisation. But it is a truth none the less, and in fact, the only truth which can save us from the chaos and the shame of our present decay.

The word *Sunnah* is used here in its widest meaning, namely, the example the Prophet has set before us in his actions and sayings. His wonderful life was a living illustration and explanation of the Qur'an, and we can do no greater justice to the Holy Book than by following him who was the means of its revelation.

We have seen that one of the main achievements of Islam — the one which distinguishes it from all other transcendental systems — is the complete reconciliation between the moral and the material sides of human life. This was one of the reasons why Islam in its prime had such a triumphant success wherever it appeared. It brought to mankind the new message that the earth need not be despised in order that heaven be gained. This prominent feature of Islam explains why our Prophet, in his mission as an apostolic guide of humanity, was so deeply concerned with human life in its polarity both as a spiritual and a material phenomenon. It does not, therefore, show a very deep understanding of Islam if one discriminates between such orders of the Prophet as deal with purely devotional and spiritual matters, and others which have to do with questions of our society and our daily life. The contention that we are obliged to follow the commands belonging to the first group, but not obliged to follow those of the second, is as superficial and, in its spirit, as anti-Islamic as the idea that certain general injunctions of the Qur'an were meant only for the ignorant Arabs at the time of the revelation, and not for the refined gentlemen of the twentieth century. At its root lies a strange under-estimation of the prophetic role of Mustafā.

As the life of a Muslim must be directed upon a full and unreserved co-operation between his spiritual and his bodily self, so the leadership of our Prophet embraces life as a compound entity, a sum total of moral and practical, individual and social

manifestations. This is the deepest meaning of Sunnah.

The Qur'an says:

*Whatever the Prophet enjoins you, accept; and whatever he forbids you, avoid (59:7).*

and the Prophet said:

The Jews have been split up into seventy-one sects, the Christians into seventy-two sects, and the Muslims will be split up into seventy-three sects" (*Sunan Abū Dāwūd, Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī, Sunan al-Dārimī, Musnad Ibn Hanbal*).

In this connection it may be mentioned that in Arabian usage the number 70 very often stands for "many", and does not necessarily denote the actual, arithmetical figure. So the Prophet obviously intended to say that the sects and divisions among the Muslims would be very many, even more than those among the Jews and Christians. And he added:

... all of them are destined for the Fire with the exception of one.

When the Companions asked which one would be the one, the right-guided group, he answered:

That which is based on my and my Companions' principles.

Certain verses of the Qur'an make this point clear beyond any possibility of misunderstanding:

*Nay, by thy Sustainer! They do not attain to faith until they make thee [O Muhammad] a judge of what is in dispute between them and find in themselves no dislike of what thou dicdest, and submit with [full] submission (4:65).*

And:

*Say [O Muhammad]: if you love God, follow me: God will love you and forgive you your sins; and God is Forgiving, a Dispenser of Grace. Say: obey God and the Apostle! But if they turn away, behold, God loveth not the Unbelievers. (3:31-32).*

The Sunnah of the Prophet is, therefore, next to the Qur'an, the second source of Islamic law of social and personal behaviour. In fact, we must regard the Sunnah as the *only valid explanation* of the Qur'anic teachings, the only means to avoid dissensions concerning their interpretation and adaptation to practical use. Many verses of the Holy Qur'an have an allegorical meaning and could be understood in different ways unless there was some definite system of interpretation. And there are, furthermore, many items of practical importance not explicitly dealt with in the Qur'an. The spirit prevailing in the Holy Book is, to be sure, uniform throughout; but to deduce from it the practical attitude which we have to adopt is not in every case an easy matter. So long as we believe that this Book is the Word of God, perfect in form and purpose, the only logical conclusion is that it never was intended to be used independently of the personal guidance of the Prophet which is embodied in the system of Sunnah.

In the next section, an attempt will be made to explain the ultimate reasons for the linking-up of the Qur'an, for all times, with the inspiring and directing personality of the Prophet. For now the following reflection should be sufficient.

Our reasoning tells us that there could not possibly be a better interpreter of the Qur'anic teachings than he through whom they were revealed to humanity. The slogan we so often hear in our days, "Let us go back to the Qur'an, but let us not be slavish followers of the Sunnah," merely betrays an ignorance of Islam. Those who speak so resemble a man who wishes to enter a palace but does not wish to employ the genuine key which alone is fit to open the door.

And so we come to the very important question as to the authenticity of the sources which reveal the life and the sayings of the Prophet to us. These sources are the Hadiths, the Traditions of the sayings and actions of the Prophet reported and transmitted by

his Companions and critically collected in the first few centuries of Islam. Many modern Muslims profess that they would be ready to follow the Sunnah; but they think they cannot rely upon the body of the Ḥadīths on which it rests. It has become a matter of fashion in our days to deny, in principle, the authenticity of Ḥadīth and, therefore, of the whole structure of the Sunnah.

Is there any scientific warrant for this attitude? Is there any scientific justification for the rejection of Ḥadīth as a dependable source of Islamic Law?

We should think that the opponents of orthodox thought would be able to bring forward really convincing arguments which would establish, once for all, the unreliability of the Traditions ascribed to the Prophet. But this is not the case. In spite of all the efforts which have been employed to challenge the authenticity of Ḥadīth as a body, those modern critics, both Eastern and Western, have not been able to back their purely temperamental criticism with results of scientific research. It would be rather difficult to do so, as the compilers of the early Ḥadīth-collections, and particularly the Imams al-Bukhārī and Muslim, have done whatever was humanly possible to put the authenticity of every Tradition to a very rigorous test — a far more rigorous test than European historians usually apply to any historical document.

It would go far beyond the limits of this book to dwell here in detail on the scrupulous method by which the reliability of Traditions was investigated by the early *muhaddithūn*, the learned men devoted to the study of Ḥadīth. For our purpose it may suffice to say that a complete science has been evolved, the only object of which is the research as to the meaning, the form and the way of transmission of the Prophet's Ḥadīths. An historical branch of this science succeeded in establishing an unbroken chain of detailed biographies of all those personalities who have ever been mentioned as narrators of Traditions. The lives of those men and women have been thoroughly investigated from every point of view, and only those have been accepted as reliable whose way of life and of transmitting a Ḥadīth perfectly responds to the standard stipulated by the great *muhaddithūn* and believed to be the most exacting that could be

conceived. If, therefore, anyone wishes to contest today the authenticity of a particular Hadīth or of the system as a whole, the burden of proving its inaccuracy falls upon him alone. It is scientifically not in the least justifiable to contest the veracity of an historical source unless one is prepared to prove that this source is defective. If no reasonable — that is, scientific — argument can be found against the veracity of the source itself or against one or more of its later transmitters, and if, on the other hand, no other, contradictory report about the same matter exists, then we are bound to accept the Tradition as true.

Suppose, for example, when someone speaks about the Indian wars of Mahmūd of Ghaznah, you suddenly get up and say, "I don't believe that Mahmūd ever came to India. It is a legend without historical foundation." What would happen in such a case? At once some person well-versed in history would try to correct your mistake and would quote chronicles and histories, based on reports of contemporaries of that famous Sultan, as a definite proof of the fact that Mahmūd *had* been in India. In that case you would have to accept the proof — or you would be regarded as a crank who for no obvious reason denies solid historical facts. If this is so, one must ask oneself why our modern critics do not extend the same logical fair-mindedness to the problem of Hadīth as well?

The primary ground for a Hadīth being false would be a wilful lie on the part of the first source, the Companion concerned, or of the later transmitters. As to the Companions, such a possibility can be ruled out *a priori*. It requires only some insight into the psychological side of the problem in order to relegate such assumptions into the sphere of pure fancy. The tremendous impression which the personality of the Prophet has made on these men and women is an outstanding fact of human history; and, moreover, it is extremely well *documented* by history. Is it conceivable that people who were ready to sacrifice themselves and all they possessed at the bidding of the Apostle of God would play tricks with his words? The Prophet had said:

Whoever intentionally lies about me will take his place in the Fire  
(*Sahīh al-Bukhārī, Sunan Abū Dāwūd, Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī, Sunan Ibn*

*Mājah, Sunan al-Dārimī, Musnad Ibn Hanbal).*

This the Companions knew; they believed implicitly in the words of the Prophet whom they regarded as the Speaker of God; and is it probable, from the psychological point of view, that they disregarded this very definite injunction?

In criminal court proceedings the first question facing the judge is *cui bono* — for whose benefit — the crime could have been committed. This judicial principle can be applied to the problem of Ḥadīth as well. With the exception of Traditions which directly concern the status of certain individuals or groups, for example, the decidedly spurious — and by most of the *muḥaddithūn* rejected — Traditions connected with the political claims of the different parties in the first century after the Prophet's death, there could have been no "profitable" reason for any individual to falsify sayings of the Prophet. It was in a just appreciation of the possibility of Ḥadīths being invented for some personal ends that the two foremost authorities among the traditionists, the Imāms Bukhārī and Muslim, have rigorously excluded all Traditions relating to party politics from their compilations. What remained was fairly beyond the suspicion of giving personal advantages to anyone.

There is one argument more on which the authenticity of a Ḥadīth could be challenged. It is conceivable that either the Companion who heard it from the lips of the Prophet or one or another of the later narrators has committed — while being subjectively truthful — a mistake due to a misunderstanding of the Prophet's words, or a lapse of memory, or some other psychological reason. But the internal — that is, psychological — evidence speaks against any great possibility of such mistakes, at least on the part of the Companions. To the people who lived with the Prophet, everyone of his sayings and actions was of utmost significance, due not only to the fascination which his personality exerted on them, but also to their firm belief that it was God's will that they should regulate their life, even in its minute details, according to the direction and the example of the Prophet. Therefore they could not take the question of his sayings offhand, but tried to preserve them in their memory even at the cost of great personal discomforts. It is



related that the Companions who were immediately associated with the Prophet made among themselves groups of two men each, one of whom was to be alternately in the vicinity of the Prophet while the other was busy with the pursuit of his livelihood or other matters; and whatever they heard or saw of their Master they communicated to each other: so anxious were they lest some saying or doing of the Prophet should escape their notice. It is not very probable that, with such an attitude, they could have been negligent as to the exact wording of a Hadīth. And if it was possible for hundreds of Companions to preserve the wording of the whole Qur'an, down to the smallest details of spelling, in their memory, then it was, no doubt, equally possible for them and for those who immediately followed them to keep single sayings of the Prophet in their memory without adding to them or omitting anything from them.

Moreover, the traditionists ascribe perfect authenticity to those Hadīths only which are reported in the same form through different, independent chains of narrators. Nor is this all. In order to be *ṣaḥīḥ* (sound), a Hadīth must be corroborated at every stage of transmission by the independent evidence of at least two — and possible more, transmitters — so that at no stage the report should hinge on the authority of one person only. This demand of corroboration is so exacting that in a Hadīth reported through, say, three "generations" of transmitters between the Companion concerned and the final compiler, actually a score or more of transmitters, distributed over those three "generations", are involved.

With all this, no Muslim has ever believed that Traditions of the Prophet could have the status, or even the undisputed authenticity, of the Qur'an. At no time the critical investigation of Hadīth has stopped. The fact that there are numberless spurious Hadīths did not in the least escape the attention of the *muhaddithūn*, as European critics naïvely seem to suppose. On the contrary, the critical science of Hadīth was initiated by the necessity of discerning between authentic and spurious, and the very Imams Bukhārī and Muslim, not to mention the lesser traditionists, are direct products of this critical attitude. The existence, therefore, of false Hadīths does not prove

anything against the system of Hadīth as a whole — no more than a fanciful tale from the *Arabian Nights* could be regarded as an argument against the authenticity of any historical report of the corresponding period.

Until now no critic has been able to prove in a systematic way that the body of Hadīth regarded as authentic according to the test-standard of the foremost traditionists is inaccurate. The rejection of authentic Traditions, either as a whole or in parts, is so far a purely temperamental matter, and has failed to establish itself as the result of unprejudiced, scientific investigation. But the motive for such an oppositional attitude among many Muslims of our time can easily be traced. This motive lies in the impossibility of bringing our present, degenerate ways of living and thinking into line with the true spirit of Islam as reflected in the Sunnah of our Prophet. In order to justify their own shortcomings and the shortcomings of their environment, those pseudo-critics of Hadīth try to remove the necessity of following the Sunnah; because, if this were done, they would be able to interpret the Qur'anic teachings just as they like, on the lines of superficial "rationalism" — that is, every one according to his own inclination and turn of mind. And in this way the exceptional position of Islam as a moral and practical, as an individual and social code, would be shattered to pieces.

In these days, when the influence of Western civilisation makes itself more and more felt in Muslim countries, one motive more is added to the strange attitude of the so-called "Muslim intelligentsia" in this matter. It is impossible to live according to the Sunnah of our Prophet and to follow the Western mode of life at one and the same time. But the present generation of Muslims is ready to adore everything that is Western, to worship the foreign civilisation because it is foreign, powerful and materially brilliant. This "Westernisation" is the strongest reason why the Traditions of our Prophet and, along with them, the whole structure of the Sunnah have become so unpopular today. The Sunnah is so obviously opposed to the fundamental ideas underlying Western civilisation that those who are fascinated by the latter see no way out of the tangle but to describe the Sunnah as an irrelevant, and therefore not

compulsory, aspect of Islam — because it is "based on unreliable Traditions." After that, it becomes easier to twist the teachings of the Qur'an in such a way that they appear to suit the spirit of Western civilisation.

### **The Spirit of the Sunnah**

Almost as important as the formal, so to say legal, justification of the Sunnah through the establishment of the historical dependability of Hadīth is the question as to its inner, spiritual, justification. Why should an observance of the Sunnah be regarded as indispensable for a life in the true sense of Islam? Is there no other way to the reality of Islam than through that large system of actions and customs, of orders and prohibitions, some of them of an obviously trivial nature, but all of them derived from the life-example of the Prophet? No doubt, he was the greatest of men; but is not the necessity to imitate his life in all its formal details an infringement on the individual freedom of human personality? It is an old objection which unfriendly critics of Islam usually put forward — that the necessity of strictly following the Sunnah was one of the main causes of the subsequent decay of the Islam world, for such an attitude is supposed to encroach, in the long run, on the liberty of human action and the natural development of society. It is of the greatest importance for the future of Islam whether we are able to meet this objection or not. Our attitude towards the problem of the Sunnah will determine our future attitude towards Islam.

We are proud, and justly proud, of the fact that Islam, as a religion, is not based on mystic dogmatism but is always open to the critical inquiry of reason. We have, therefore, the right not only to know that the observance of the Sunnah has been imposed upon us, but also to understand the inherent reason of its imposition.

Islam leads man to a unification of all aspects of life. Being a means to that goal, this religion represents in itself a totality of conceptions to which nothing can be added and from which nothing can be subtracted. There is no room for eclecticism in Islam. Wherever its teachings are recognised as really pronounced by the

Qur'an or the Prophet we must accept them in their completeness; otherwise they lose their value. It is a fundamental misunderstanding of Islam to think that, being a religion of reason, it leaves its teachings open to individual selection — a claim made possible by a popular misconception of "rationalism". There is a wide — and by the philosophy of all ages sufficiently recognised — gulf between reason and "rationalism" as it is commonly understood today. The function of reason in regard to religious teachings is of a controlling character; its duty is to watch that nothing is imposed on the human mind which it cannot bear easily, that is, without the aid of philosophical juggleries. So far as Islam is concerned, unprejudiced reason has, time and again, given it its unreserved vote of confidence. That does not mean that every one who gets in touch with Islam will necessarily accept its teachings as obliging for himself; this is a matter of temperament and — last but not least — of spiritual illumination. But surely and certainly no unbiased person would contend that there is anything in Islam contrary to reason. No doubt, there are things in it beyond the limits of human understanding, but nothing which is contrary to it.

The role of reason in religious matters is, as we have seen, in the nature of a control — a registration apparatus saying "yes" or "no", as the case may be. But this is not the case with so-called "rationalism". It does not content itself with registration and control, but jumps into the field of speculation; it is not receptive and detached like pure reason, but extremely subjective and temperamental. Reason knows its own limits; but "rationalism" is preposterous in its claim to encompass the world and all mysteries within its own, individual circle. In religious matters it hardly even concedes the possibility of certain things being, temporarily or permanently, beyond human understanding; but it is, at the same time, illogical enough to concede this possibility to science — and so to itself.

The over-estimation of this unimaginative rationalism is one of the causes why so many modern Muslims refuse to surrender themselves to the guidance of the Prophet. But it does not need a Kant today to prove that human understanding is strictly limited in

its possibilities. Our mind is unable, by virtue of its nature, to understand the idea of *totality*; we can grasp, of all things, their details only. We do not know what infinity or eternity is; we do not even know what life is. In problems of a religion resting on transcendental foundations we, therefore, need a guide whose mind possesses something more than the normal reasoning qualities and the subjective rationalism common to all of us. We need someone who is inspired — in one word, a Prophet. If we believe that the Qur'an is the Word of God, and that Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) was God's Apostle, we are not only morally, but also intellectually bound to follow his guidance blindly. The expression "blindly" does not mean that we should exclude our powers of reasoning. On the contrary, we have to make use of those powers to the best of our ability and knowledge; we have to try to discover the inherent meaning and purpose of the commands transmitted to us by the Prophet. But in any case — whether we are able to understand its ultimate purpose or not — we must obey the order. I should like to illustrate this by the example of a soldier who had been ordered by his general to occupy a certain strategic position. The good soldier will follow and execute the order immediately. If, while doing so, he is able to explain to himself the ultimate, strategic purpose which the general had in view, the better for him and for his career; but if the deeper aim which underlies the general's command does not reveal itself to him at once, he is nevertheless not entitled to give up or even to postpone its execution. We Muslims rely upon our Prophet's being the best commander mankind could ever get. We naturally believe that he knew the domain of religion both in its spiritual and its social aspect far better than we ever could. In ordering us to do this or to avoid that, he always had some "strategic" objective in view which he thought to be indispensable for the spiritual or social welfare of man. Sometimes this object is clearly visible, and sometimes it is more or less hidden before the untrained eyes of the average man, sometimes we can understand the deepest aim of the Prophet's order, and sometimes only the superficial, immediate purpose. Whatever the case may be, we are bound to follow the Prophet's commands, provided their authenticity

is reasonably established. Nothing else matters. Of course, there are commands of the Prophet which are obviously of paramount importance and others which are less important, and we have to give the more important precedence over the less important. But never have we the right to disregard any one of them because they appear to us "inessential" — for it is said in the Qur'an of the Prophet:

*He does not speak of his own desire (53:8).*

That is, he speaks only when an objective *necessity* arises; and he does it because God orders him to do so. And for this reason we are obliged to follow the Prophet's Sunnah in spirit *and* in form, if we wish to be true to the spirit of Islam.

Once the objective necessity, for a Muslim, to follow the Sunnah of his Prophet is established, he has the right, and even the duty, to inquire into its role within the religious and social structure of Islam. What is the spiritual meaning of that great, detailed system of laws and rules of conduct which are supposed to pervade the life of a Muslim from his birth to the moment of death, and to regulate his behaviour in the most important as well as in the most insignificant phases of his existence? Or is there, perhaps, no meaning at all? Was there any good in the Prophet's ordering his followers to do everything in the way he did it? What difference can it make whether I eat with the right or with the left hand — if both are equally clean? What difference whether I keep my beard or shave it? Are such things not purely formal? Have they any bearing on the progress of man or on the welfare of society? And if not, why have they been imposed on us?

It is high time for us, who believe that Islam stands and falls with the observance of the Sunnah, to answer the questions.

There are, to my knowledge, at least three distinct reasons for the institution of Sunnah.

The first reason is the training of man, in a methodical way, to live permanently in a state of consciousness, wakefulness and self-control. In the spiritual progress of man, haphazard actions and habits are like stumbling blocks in the way of a racing horse; they

must be reduced to a minimum, because they destroy spiritual concentration. Everything we do should be determined by our will and submitted to our moral control. But in order to be able to do so we must learn to *observe* ourselves. This necessity, for a Muslim, of permanent self-control has been beautifully expressed by 'Umar al-Khattāb:

Render to yourselves account about yourselves before you are called upon to render account.

And the Prophet said:

Worship thy Lord as if thou saw him (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, *Sunan Abū Dāwūd*, *Sunan al-Nasā'ī*).

It has been pointed out before that the Islamic idea of worship embraces not only the strictly devotional duties but actually the whole of our life. Its goal is the unification of our spiritual and our material selves into one single entity. Our endeavours must be, therefore, clearly directed towards the elimination of the unconscious, uncontrolled factors in our life as much as this is humanly possible. Self-observation is the first step on this way; and the surest method to train oneself in self-observation is to get the habitual, seemingly unimportant actions of our daily life under control. Those "small" things, those "unimportant" actions and habits are, in the context of the mental training we are speaking of, in reality far more important than the "great" activities in our life. The great things are always, by virtue of their greatness, clearly visible; and therefore they mostly remain within the sphere of consciousness. But those other, those "small" things, easily escape our attention and cheat our control. Therefore they are by far the more valuable objects on which we can sharpen our powers of self-control.

It might be perhaps, in itself, not important with which hand we eat or whether we shave or keep our beard: but it is psychologically of the highest importance to do things according to a systematic resolve, for by doing so we keep ourselves keyed up to a high pitch of self-observation and moral control. This is not an easy matter —

for, laziness of the mind is no less real than laziness of the body. If you ask a man who is accustomed to a sedentary mode of life to walk a long distance, he will soon grow tired and be unable to proceed further. But not so a man who throughout the whole of his life has trained himself in walking. For him this kind of muscular exertion is no exertion at all; it is a pleasant bodily action to which he is accustomed. This is a further explanation why the Sunnah covers almost every aspect of human life. If we are constantly called upon to subject all our actions and omissions to conscious discrimination, our power of self-observation grows steadily and in time becomes our second nature. Everyday, as long as this training proceeds, our moral laziness diminishes along with it.

The use of the expression "training" naturally implies that its result is dependent on the *consciousness* of its performance. The moment the practice of the Sunnah degenerates into mechanical routine it entirely loses its educative value. Such has been the case with the Muslims during the last centuries. When the Companions of the Prophet and the generations which succeeded them made the attempt to conform every detail of their existence to the example of the Master, they did it in conscious surrender to a directive will that would shape their life in the spirit of the Qur'an. Owing to this conscious resolve they could benefit by the training through Sunnah to the full extent. It is not the fault of the system if the Muslims of later times did not make the right use of the psychological avenues it opened. This omission was probably due, in a very large measure, to the influence of Sufism with its more or less pronounced contempt of the active and its emphasis on the purely receptive energies in man. As the practice of Sunnah had been already established as a component of Islamic religious life since the very beginning of Islam, Sufism did not succeed in uprooting it in principle. But it succeeded in neutralising its active vigour and so, to a certain extent, its utility. The Sunnah remained, for the Sufis, an ideogram of only platonic importance, with a mystical background; for the theologians and legists, a system of laws; and for the Muslim masses nothing but a hollow shell without any living meaning. But notwithstanding the failure of the Muslims to benefit from the teachings of the Holy



Qur'an and their interpretation through the Sunnah of the Prophet, the idea underlying the teachings as well as their interpretation has remained intact, and there is no reason why it could not be put into practice once again. The real objective of the Sunnah is not, as our antagonistic critics presume, the breeding of Pharisees and dry formalists, but of conscious, determined, deep-hearted men of action. Men and women of such a style were the Companions of the Prophet. The permanent consciousness, inner wakefulness and sense of responsibility in all they did — therein lies the secret of their miraculous efficiency and their startling historical success.

This is the first and, so to say, individual aspect of the Sunnah. Its second aspect is its social importance and utility. There can be hardly any doubt that most of the social conflicts are due to men's misunderstanding each other's actions and intentions. The cause of such a misunderstanding is the extreme variety of temperaments and inclinations in the individual members of the society. Now different temperaments force different habits on men, and those different habits, hardened through the usage of long years, become barriers between individuals. If, on the contrary, several individuals happen to have identical habits throughout their life, there is every probability of their mutual relations being sympathetic and their minds ready to understand each other. Therefore Islam, which is equally concerned with social as well as with individual welfare, makes it an essential point that the individual members of the society should be systematically induced to make their habits and customs resemble each other, however different their social or economic status be in each case.

But beyond this, the Sunnah in its so-called "rigidity" renders even a greater service to society. It makes it coherent and stable in form and precludes the development of antagonisms and conflicts such as have, under the name of "social questions," caused a considerable confusion in Western society. Such social questions arise when certain institutions or customs are felt to be imperfect or defective, and are therefore open to criticism and progressive changes. But for the Muslims — that is for those who consider themselves bound by the Law of the Qur'an and, consequently, by

the injunctions given by the Prophet — the conditions of the society must have a settled appearance, because they are supposed to be of transcendental origin. As long as there is no doubt as to this origin, no need and no desire will arise to question the social organisation in its fundamentals. It is only thus that we can conceive a practical possibility for the Qur'anic postulate that the Muslims should be like a "solid building". If we apply this principle to our communal life, there should be no necessity for the society to spend its energies on side-issues and partial "reforms" which, owing to their very nature, can have only passing value. Freed from dialectical confusion and built on the solid pedestal of the Divine Law and the life-example of our Prophet, Islamic society could use all its forces on problems of real material and intellectual welfare, thus paving the way for the individual in his spiritual endeavours. This, and nothing else, is the real, religious objective of the Islamic social organisation.

And now we come to the third aspect of the Sunnah and the necessity of our strictly following it.

In this system many details of our daily life are based on the example set by the Prophet. Whatever we do, we are permanently compelled to think of a corresponding doing or saying of the Prophet. Thus the personality of the Greatest Man becomes deeply embodied in the very routine of our daily life, and his spiritual influence is made a real, ever recurring factor in our existence. Consciously and subconsciously we are led to study the Prophet's attitude in this or that matter. We learn to regard him not only as the bearer of a moral revelation but also as the guide towards a perfect life. It is here that we must decide whether we wish to regard the Prophet as a mere wise man among many other wise men, or as the supreme Messenger of God always acting under Divine inspiration. The view-point of the Holy Qur'an in this matter is clear beyond any possibility of misunderstanding. A man who is designed as the "Last of the Prophets" and a "Mercy to the Worlds" cannot be but permanently inspired. To reject his guidance, or certain elements of it, would mean nothing less than to reject or underestimate God's own guidance. It would mean further, in the logical continuation of this thought, that the entire message of Islam was not intended to be

a final, but only an *alternative* solution of man's problems, and that it is left to our discretion to choose this or some other, perhaps equally true and useful, solution. This easy — because morally and practically not in the least obliging — principle might lead us anywhere, but surely not to the spirit of Islam, of which it is said in the Qur'an.

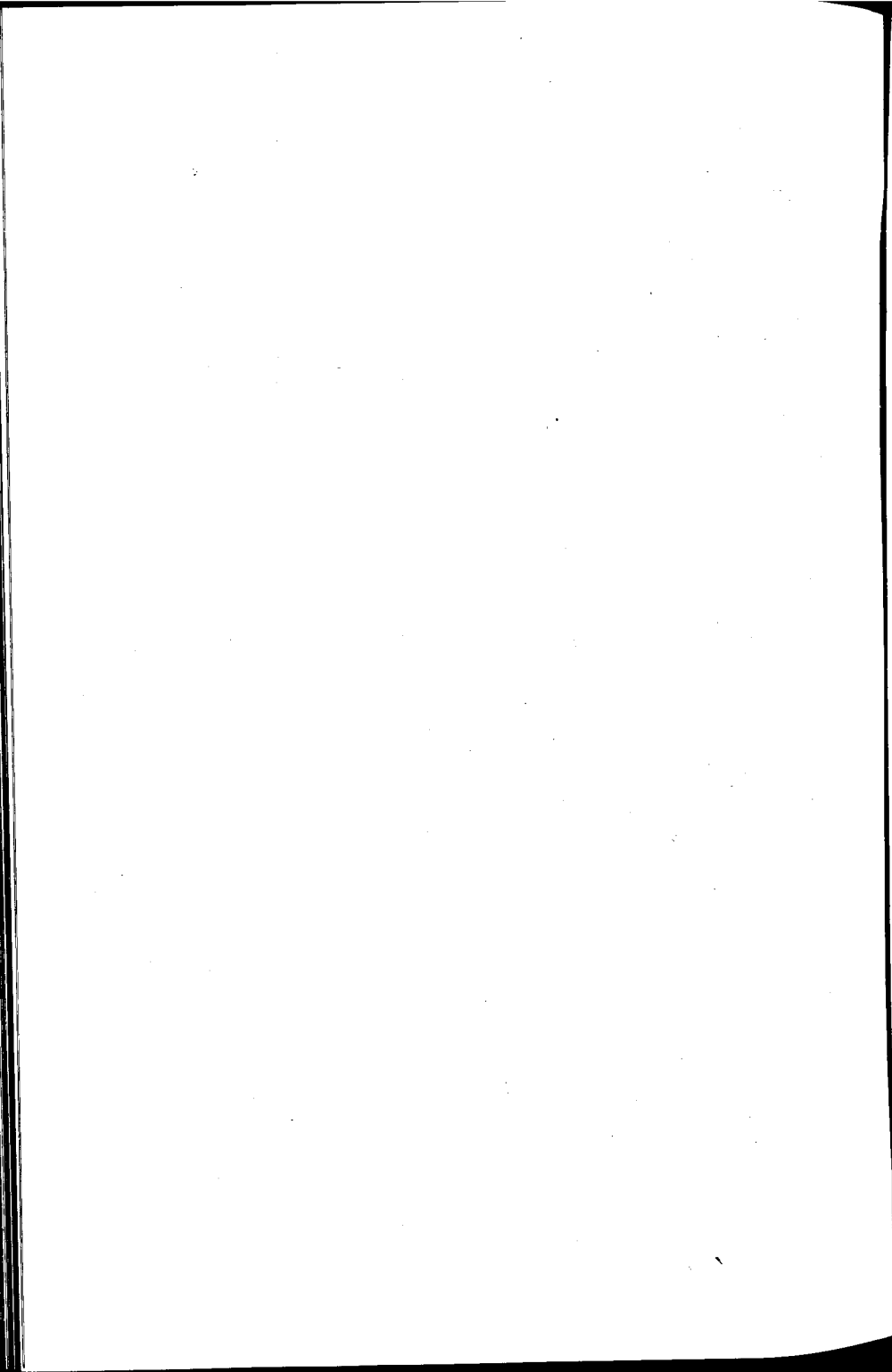
*Today I have made perfect for you your religion, and fulfilled My favour unto you, and chosen Islam as your religion (5:3).*

We regard Islam as superior to all other religious systems because it embraces life in its totality. It takes World and Hereafter, soul and body, individual and society, equally into consideration. It takes into consideration not only the lofty possibilities of the human nature, but also its inherent limitations and weaknesses. It does not impose the impossible upon us, but directs us how to make the best use of our possibilities and to reach a higher plane of reality where there is no cleavage and no antagonism between Idea and Action. It is not a way among others, but *the* Way; and the Man who gave us this teaching is not just one guide among others, but *the* Guide. To follow him and all he did and ordered is to follow Islam; to discard his Sunnah is to discard the reality of Islam.

# **PART THREE**

## **MYSTICAL AND SPIRITUAL DIMENSION OF THE SUNNAH**

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# 11

## THE PROPHET AS THE EXAMPLAR *PAR EXCELLENCE*

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SEYYED HOSSEIN NASR

The Prophet as the founder of Islam and the messenger of God's revelation to mankind is the interpreter *par excellence* of the Book of God; and his Ḥadīth and Sunnah, his sayings and actions, are after the Qur'an, the most important sources of the Islamic tradition. In order to understand the significance of the Prophet it is not sufficient to study, from the outside, historical texts pertaining to his life. One must view him also from within the Islamic point of view and try to discover the position he occupies in the religious consciousness of Muslims. When in any Islamic language one says *the Prophet*, it means Muḥammad — whose name as such is never iterated except that as a courtesy it be followed by the formula "*sall-Allāhu 'alayhi wa sallam*", that is, "may God's blessing and salutation be upon him".

It is even legitimate to say that, in general, when one says *the Prophet* it means the prophet of Islam; for although in every religion the founder, who is an aspect of the Universal Intellect, becomes the Aspect, the Word, the Incarnation, nevertheless each founder

emphasizes a certain aspect of the Truth and even typifies that aspect universally. Although there is belief in incarnation in many religions, when one says *the Incarnation* it refers to Christ who personifies this aspect. And although every prophet and saint has experienced 'enlightenment', *the Enlightenment* refers to the experience of the Buddha which is the most outstanding and universal embodiment of this experience. In the same manner the prophet of Islam is the prototype and perfect embodiment of prophecy and so in a profound sense is *the Prophet*. In fact in Islam every form of revelation is envisaged as a prophecy whose complete and total realization is to be seen in Muḥammad — upon whom be peace. As the Sufi poet Mahmūd Shabistārī writes in his incomparable *Gulshan-i rāz* (*The Secret Rose Garden*):

The first appearance of prophethood was in Adam,  
And its perfection was in the 'Seal of the Prophets'.

(Whinfield translation)

It is difficult for a non-Muslim to understand the spiritual significance of the Prophet and his role as the prototype of the religious and spiritual life, especially if one comes from a Christian background. Compared to Christ, or to the Buddha for that matter, the earthly career of the Prophet seems often too human and too engrossed in the vicissitudes of social, economic and political activity to serve as a model for the spiritual life. That is why so many people who write today of the great spiritual guides of humanity are not able to understand and interpret him sympathetically. It is easier to see the spiritual radiance of Christ or even medieval saints, Christian or Muslim, than that of the Prophet, although the Prophet is the supreme saint in Islam without whom there would have been no sanctity whatsoever.

The reason for this difficulty is that the spiritual nature of the Prophet is veiled in his human one and his purely spiritual function is hidden in his duties as the guide of men and the leader of a community. It was the function of the Prophet to be, not only a spiritual guide, but also the organizer of a new social order with all that such a function implies. And it is precisely this aspect of his

being that veils his purely spiritual dimension from foreign eyes. Outsiders have understood his political genius, his power of oratory, his great statesmanship, but few have understood how he could be the religious and spiritual guide of men and how his life could be emulated by those who aspire to sanctity. This is particularly true in the modern world in which religion is separated from other domains of life and most modern men can hardly imagine how a spiritual being could also be immersed in the most intense political and social activity.

Actually if the contour of the personality of the Prophet is to be understood he should not be compared to Christ or the Buddha whose message was meant primarily for saintly men and who founded a community based on monastic life which later became the norm of a whole society. Rather, because of his dual function as 'king' and 'prophet', as the guide of men in this world and the hereafter, the Prophet should be compared to the prophet-kings of the Old Testament, to David and Solomon, and especially to Abraham himself. Or to cite once again an example outside the Abrahamic tradition, the spiritual type of the Prophet should be compared in Hinduism, to Rama and Krishna, who although in a completely different traditional climate, were *avātaras* and at the same time kings and house-holders who participated in social life with all that such activity implies as recorded in the *Mahabhārata* and the *Ramāyana*.

This type of figure who is at once a spiritual being and a leader of men has always been, relatively speaking, rare in the Christian West, especially in modern times. Political life has become so divorced from spiritual principles that to many people such a function itself appears as an impossibility in proof of which Westerners often point to the purely spiritual life of Christ who said, "My Kingdom is not of this world." And even historically the Occident has not witnessed many figures of this type unless one considers the Templars and in another context such devout kings as Charlemagne and St. Louis. The figure of the Prophet is thus difficult for many Occidentals to understand and this misconception to which often bad intention has been added is responsible for the



nearly total ignorance of his spiritual nature in most works written about him in Western languages of which the number is legion. One could in fact say that of the major elements of Islam the real significance of the Prophet is the least understood to non-Muslims and especially to Occidentals.

The Prophet did participate in social life in its fullest sense. He married, had a household, was a father and moreover he was ruler and judge and had also to fight many wars in which he underwent painful ordeals. He had to undergo many hardships and experience all the difficulties which human life, especially that of the founder of a new state and society, implies. But within all these activities his heart rested in contentment with the Divine, and he continued inwardly to repose in the Divine Peace. In fact his participation in social and political life was precisely to integrate this domain into a spiritual centre.

The Prophet entertained no political or worldly ambition whatsoever. He was by nature a contemplative. Before being chosen as prophet he did not like to frequent social gatherings and activities. He led a caravan from Makkah to Syria passing through the majestic silence of the desert whose very 'infinity' induces man towards contemplation. He often spent long periods in the cave of Hīrā' in solitude and meditation. He did not believe himself to be by nature a man of the world or one who was naturally inclined to seek political power among the Quraysh or social eminence in Makkan society although he came from the noblest family. It was in fact very painful and difficult for him to accept the burden of prophecy which implied the founding of not only a new religion but also a new social and political order. All the traditional sources, which alone matter in this case, testify to the great hardship the Prophet underwent by being chosen to participate in the active life in its most acute form. Modern studies on the life of the Prophet which depict him as a man who enjoyed fighting wars, are totally untrue and in fact a reversal of the real personality of the Prophet. Immediately after the reception of the first revelation the Prophet confessed to his wife, Khadījah, how difficult it was for him to accept the burden of prophecy and how fearful he was of all that such a mission implied.

Likewise, with the marriages of the Prophet, they are not at all signs of his lenience *vis-à-vis* the flesh. During the period of youth when the passions are most strong the Prophet lived with only one wife who was much older than he and also underwent long periods of abstinence. And as a prophet many of his marriages were political ones which, in the prevalent social structure of Arabia, guaranteed the consolidation of the newly founded Muslim community. Multiple marriage, for him, as is true of Islam in general, was not so much enjoyment as responsibility and a means of integration of the newly founded society. Besides, in Islam the whole problem of sexuality appears in a different light from that in Christianity and should not be judged by the same standards. The multiple marriages of the Prophet, far from pointing to his weakness towards 'the flesh', symbolize his patriarchal nature and his function, not as a saint who withdraws from the world, but as one who sanctifies the very life of the world by living in it and accepting it with the aim of integrating it into a higher order of reality.

The Prophet has also often been criticized by modern Western authors for being cruel and for having treated men harshly. Such a charge is again absurd because critics of this kind have forgotten that either a religion leaves the world aside, as Christ did, or integrates the world, in which case it must deal with such questions as war, retribution, justice, etc. When Charlemagne or some other Christian king thrust a sword into the breast of a heathen soldier he was, from the individual point of view, being cruel to that soldier. But on the universal plane this was a necessity for the preservation of a Christian civilization which had to defend its borders or perish. The same holds true for a Buddhist king or ruler, or for that matter any religious authority which seeks to integrate human society.

The Prophet exercised the utmost kindness possible and was harsh only with traitors. Now, a traitor against a newly founded religious community, which God has willed and whose existence is a mercy from heaven for mankind, is a traitor against the Truth itself. The harshness of the Prophet in such cases is an expression of Divine Justice. One cannot accuse God of being cruel because men die, or because there is illness and ugliness in the world. Every

construction implies a previous destruction, a clearing of grounds for the appearance of a new form. This holds true not only in case of a physical structure but also in case of a new revelation which must clear the ground if it is to be a new social and political order as well as a purely religious one. What appears to some as the cruelty of the Prophet towards men is precisely this aspect of his function as the instrument of God for the establishment of a new world order whose homeland in Arabia was to be pure of any paganism and polytheism which if present would pollute the very source of this new fountain of life. As to what concerned his own person, the Prophet was always the epitome of kindness and generosity.

Nowhere is the nobility and generosity of the Prophet better exemplified than in his triumphant entry into Makkah, which in a sense highlights his earthly career. There, at a moment when the very people who had caused untold hardships and trials for the Prophet were completely subdued by him, instead of thinking of vengeance, which was certainly his due, he forgave them. One must study closely the almost unimaginable obstacles placed before the Prophet by these same people, of the immense suffering he had undergone because of them, to realize what degree of generosity this act of the Prophet implies. It is not actually necessary to give an apologetic account of the life of the Prophet, but these matters need to be answered because the false and often malicious accusations of this kind made against the founder of Islam in so many modern studies make the understanding of him by those who rely upon such studies well nigh impossible.

Also the Prophet was not certainly without love and compassion. Many incidents in his life and sayings recorded in Hadīth literature point to his depth of love for God which, in conformity with the general perspective of Islam, was never divorced from the knowledge of Him. For example, in a well known Hadīth, he said:

O Lord, grant to me the love of thee. Grant that I love those that love thee. Grant that I may do the deed that wins thy love. Make thy love dear to me more than self, family and wealth.

Such sayings clearly demonstrate the fact that although the Prophet

was in a sense a king or ruler of a community and a judge and had to deal according to justice in both capacities, he was at the same time one whose being was anchored in the love for God. Otherwise, he could not have been a prophet.

From the Muslim point of view, the Prophet is the symbol of perfection of both the human person and human society. He is the prototype of the human individual and the human collectivity. As such he bears certain characteristics in the eye of traditional Muslims which can only be discovered by studying the traditional accounts of him. The many Western works on the Prophet, with very few exceptions, are useless from this point of view no matter how much historical data they provide for the reader. The same holds true in fact for the new type of biographies of the Prophet written by modernized Muslims who would like at all cost to make the Prophet an ordinary man and neglect systematically any aspect of his being that does not conform to a humanistic and rationalistic framework they have adopted *a priori*, mostly as a result of either influence from or reaction to the modern Western point of view. The profound characteristics of the Prophet which have guided the Islamic community over the centuries and have left an indelible mark on the consciousness of the Muslim cannot be discerned save through the traditional sources and the Hadīth, and, of course, the Qur'an itself which bears the perfume of the soul of the person through whom it was revealed.

The universal characteristics of the Prophet are not the same as his daily actions and day to day life, which can be read about in standard biographies of the Prophet, and with which we cannot deal here. They are, rather, characteristics which issue forth from his personality as a particular spiritual prototype. Seen in this light there are essentially three qualities that characterize the Prophet. First of all the Prophet possessed the quality of piety in its most universal sense, that quality which attaches man to God. The Prophet was in that sense pious. He had a profound piety which inwardly attached him to God, that made him place the interest of God before everything else including himself. Secondly, he had a quality of combativeness, of always being actively engaged in combat against

all that negated the Truth and disrupted harmony. Externally it meant fighting wars, either military, political or social ones, the war which the Prophet named the 'little holy war' (*al-jihād al-asghar*). Inwardly this combativeness meant a continuous war against the carnal soul (*nafs*), against all that in man tends towards the negation of God and His Will, the 'great holy war' (*al-jihād al-akbar*).

It is difficult for modern men to understand the positive symbolism of war thanks to modern technology which has made war total and its instruments the very embodiment of what is ugly and evil. Men therefore think that the role of religion is only in preserving some kind of precarious peace. This, of course, is true, but not in the superficial sense that is usually meant. If religion is to be an integral part of life it must try to establish peace in the most profound sense, namely to establish equilibrium between all the existing forces that surround man and to overcome all the forces that tend to destroy this equilibrium. No religion has sought to establish peace in this sense more than Islam. It is precisely in such a context that war can have a positive meaning as the activity to establish harmony both inwardly and outwardly and it is in this sense that Islam has stressed the positive aspect of combativeness.

The Prophet embodies to an eminent degree this perfection of combative virtue. If one thinks of the Buddha as sitting in a state of contemplation under the Bo-tree, the Prophet can be imagined as a rider sitting on a steed with the sword of justice and discrimination drawn in his hand and galloping at full speed, yet ready to come to an immediate halt before the mountain of Truth. The Prophet was faced from the beginning of his prophetic mission with the task of wielding the sword of Truth, of establishing equilibrium and in this arduous task he had no rest. His rest and repose was in the heart of the holy war (*jihād*) itself and he represents this aspect of spirituality in which peace comes not in passivity but in true activity. Peace belongs to one who is inwardly at peace with the Will of Heaven and outwardly at war with the forces of disruption and disequilibrium.

Finally, the Prophet possessed the quality of magnanimity in its fullness. His soul displayed a grandeur which every devout Muslim feels. He is for the Muslim nobility and magnanimity personified.

This aspect of the Prophet is fully displayed in his treatment of his Companions which, in fact, has been the model for later ages and which all generations of Muslims have sought to emulate.

To put it another way, which focuses more sharply the personality of the Prophet, the qualities can be enumerated as strength, nobility and serenity or inner calm. Strength is outwardly manifested in the little holy war and inwardly in the great holy war according to the saying of the Prophet who, returning from one of the early wars, said:

We have returned from the small *jihād* to the great *jihād*.

It is this great *jihād* which is of particular spiritual significance as a war against all those tendencies which pull the soul of man away from the Centre and Origin and bar him from the grace of heaven.

The nobility or generosity of the Prophet shows itself most of all in charity towards all men and more generally towards all beings. Of course this virtue is not central as in Christianity which can be called the religion of charity. But it is important on the human level and as it concerns the person of the Prophet. It points to the fact that there was no narrowness or pettiness in the soul of the Prophet, no limitation in giving of himself to others. A spiritual man is one who always gives to those around him and does not receive, according to the saying, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." It was characteristic of the Prophet to have always given till the last moment of his life. He never asked anything for himself and never sought to receive.

The aspect of serenity, which also characterizes all true expressions of Islam, is essentially the love of truth. It is to put the Truth before everything else. It is to be impartial, to be logical on the level of discourse, not to let one's emotions colour and prejudice one's intellectual judgment. It is not to be a rationalist, but to see the truth of things and to love the Truth above all else. To love the Truth is to love God Who is the Truth, one of His Names being the Truth (*al-haqq*).

If one were to compare these qualities of the Prophet, namely, strength, nobility and serenity, with those of the founders of the

other great religions one would see that they are not necessarily the same because firstly, the Prophet was not himself the Divine Incarnation and secondly, because each religion emphasizes a certain aspect of the Truth. One cannot follow and emulate Christ in the same manner as the Prophet because in Christianity Christ is the God-man, the Divine Incarnation. One can be absorbed into his nature but he cannot be copied as the perfection of the human state. One can neither walk on water nor raise the dead to life. Still, when one thinks of Christianity and Christ another set of characteristics come to mind, such as divinity, incarnation, and on another level love, charity and sacrifice. Or when one thinks of the Buddha and Buddhism it is most of all the ideas of pity for the whole of creation, enlightenment and illumination and extinction in Nirvana that stand out.

In Islam, when one thinks of the Prophet who is to be emulated, it is the image of a strong personality that comes to mind, who is severe with himself and with the false and the unjust, and charitable towards the world that surrounds him. On the basis of these two virtues of strength and sobriety on the one hand and charity and generosity on the other, he is serene, extinguished in the Truth. He is that warrior on horseback who halts before the mountain of Truth, passive towards the Divine Will, active towards the world, hard and sober towards himself and kind and generous towards the creatures about him.

These qualities characteristic of the Prophet are contained virtually in the sound of the second *Shahādah*, *Muhammad al-rasūl Allāh*, that is, Muhammad is the Prophet of God, in its Arabic pronunciation, not in its translation into another language. Here again the symbolism is inextricably connected to the sounds and forms of the sacred language and cannot be translated. The very sound of the name Muḥammad implies force, a sudden breaking forth of a power which is from God and is not just human. The word *rasūl* with its elongated second syllable symbolizes this 'expansion of the chest' (*inshirāh al-sadr*), and a generosity that flows from the being of the Prophet and which ultimately comes from God. As for Allah it is, of course, the Truth itself which terminates the formula.

The second *Shahādah* thus implies by its sound the power, generosity and serenity of reposing in the Truth characteristic of the Prophet. But this repose in the Truth is not based on a flight from the world but on a penetration into it in order to integrate and organize it. The spiritual castle in Islam is based on the firm foundations of harmony within human society and in individual human life.

In the traditional prayers on the Prophet which all Muslims recite on certain occasions, God's blessing and salutation are asked for the Prophet who is God's servant (*'abd*), His messenger (*rasūl*), and the unlettered Prophet (*al-nabī al-ummī*). For example, one well-known version of the formula of benediction upon the Prophet is as follows:

Oh, God, bless our Lord Muḥammad, Thy servant and Thy Messenger, the unlettered Prophet, and his family and his companions, and salute them.

Here again the three epithets with which his name is qualified symbolize his three basic characteristics which stand out most in the eyes of devout Muslims. He is first of all an *'abd*; but who is an *'abd* except one whose will is surrendered to the will of his master, who is himself poor (*faqīr*) but rich on account of what his master bestows upon him. As the *'abd* of God the Prophet exemplified in its fullness this spiritual poverty and sobriety which is so characteristic of Islam. He loved fasting, vigilance, prayer, all of which have become essential elements in Islamic religious life. As an *'abd* the Prophet put everything in the hands of God and realized a poverty which is, in reality, the most perfect and enduring wealth.

The *rasūl* in this formula again symbolizes his aspect of charity and generosity and metaphysically the *rasūl* himself is sent because of God's charity for the world and men whom He loves so that He sends His prophets to guide them. That is why the Prophet is 'God's mercy to the worlds.' For the Muslim the Prophet himself displays mercy and generosity, a generosity which flows from the nobility of character. Islam has always emphasized this quality and sought to inculcate nobility in the souls of men. A good Muslim must have



some nobility and generosity which always reflect this aspect of the personality of the Prophet.

As for the *nabī al-ummī*, it symbolizes extinction before the Truth. The unlettered nature of the Prophet means most of all the extinction of all that is human before the Divine. The soul of the Prophet was a *tabula rasa* before the Divine Pen and on the human level his quality of 'unletteredness' marks that supreme virtue of realizing the Truth through the contemplation of it which marks an 'extinction' in the metaphysical sense before the Truth. Only through this extinction (*fanā*) can one hope to enter into life with God and subsistence in Him (*baqā*).

To summarize the qualities of the Prophet, it can be said that he is human equilibrium which has become extinct in the Divine Truth. He marks the establishment of harmony and equilibrium between all the tendencies present in man, his sensual, social, economic, political tendencies, which cannot be overcome unless the human state itself is transcended. He displays the integration of these tendencies and forces with the aim of establishing a basis which naturally leads towards contemplation and extinction in the Truth. His spiritual way means to accept the human condition which is normalized and sanctified as the ground for the most lofty spiritual casile. The spirituality of Islam of which the Prophet is the prototype is not the rejection of the world but the transcending of it through its integration into a Centre and the establishment of a harmony upon which the quest for the Absolute is based. The Prophet in these qualities that he displayed so eminently is at once the prototype of human and spiritual perfection and a guide towards its realization, for as the Qur'an states:

*Verily in the messenger of Allah ye have a good example*  
(33:21).

Since the Prophet is the prototype of all human perfection to the extent that one of his titles is the 'most noble of all creation' (*ashraf al-makhliqāt*), it may be asked in what way can men emulate him. How can the Prophet become a guide for human life, and his life.

deeds and thoughts serve as a guide for the Muslim in this terrestrial journey? The answer to this fundamental question, which concerns all the individual and collective life of Muslims of later generations, lies in the sayings which he left behind and which are known as *Hadīth* and his daily life and practice known as *Sunnah*. The family and companions of the Prophet who had been with him during his life time bore the impressions of his *Sunnah* within their souls with a depth that results from contact with a prophet. When man meets an extraordinary person he carries the impression of this meeting always. Then how permanent must have been the impression made on men by the Prophet, whose encounter is so much outside of ordinary experience today that human beings can hardly imagine it. The first generation of Muslims practiced this *Sunnah* with all the ardour and faith that resulted from their proximity to the source of the revelation and the presence of the *barakah* or grace of the Prophet among them. They in turn were emulated by the next generation and so on to modern times when the faithful still seek to base their lives upon that of the Prophet. This end is achieved through the fresh interpretation that each generation makes of his life (*siyar*), through the litanies and chants repeated in his praise (*mada'ih*) and through the celebrations marking his birth (*mawlid*) or other joyous occasions.

As for the *Hadīth*, these too were memorized by those who heard them and were in turn transmitted to those who followed during succeeding generations. Here again it was not a question of memorizing just anything but of remembering the sayings of one whom God had chosen as His messenger. And those who memorized the prophetic sayings were not like modern men whose memory has been dulled by formalized classroom learning and over-reliance on written sources, but nomads or men of nomadic background for whom speech and literature were connected with what was known by heart. These were men who possessed remarkable powers of memory, which still survive among certain so-called 'illiterate' people and which have often startled 'literate' observers from sedentary civilizations.

The sayings of the Prophet were eventually collected as the

spread of Islam and the gradual moving away from the homogeneity of the early community endangered their integral existence. The devoutest of men set about to collect prophetic sayings or a Hadīth, examining the chain of transmitters for each saying. As a result in the Sunni world six major collections of Hadīth became assembled such as those of al-Bukhārī and Muslim and soon gained complete authority in the orthodox community. In Shi'ism a similar process took place except that in addition to the sayings of the Prophet those of the Imams, whose teachings expound the meaning of the prophetic message, form a part of the Hadīth collection. There too, volumes of these sayings were assembled of which the most important is the *Uṣūl al-Kāfi* of Kulaynī.

The Hadīth literature, in both Sunni and Shi'ite sources, is a monumental treasury of wisdom which is at once a commentary upon the Qur'an and a complement to its teachings. The prophetic sayings concern every domain from pure metaphysics to table manners. In them one finds what the Prophet said at times of distress, in receiving an ambassador, in treating a prisoner, in dealing with his family, and in nearly every other situation which touches upon the domestic, economic, social and political life of man. In addition, in this literature many questions pertaining to metaphysics, cosmology, eschatology and the spiritual life are discussed. Altogether, after the Qur'an, the Hadīth and the prophetic Sunnah which is closely bound to it are the most precious source of guidance which Islamic society possesses, and along with the Qur'an they are the fountain head of all Islamic life and thought.

It is against this basic aspect of the whole structure of Islam that a severe attack has been made in recent years by an influential school of Western orientalists. No more of a vicious and insidious attack could be made against Islam than this one, which undercuts its very foundations and whose effect is more dangerous than if a physical attack were made against Islam.

Purporting to be scientific and applying the famous — or rather should one say the infamous — historical method which reduces all religious truths to historical facts, the critics of Hadīth have come to the conclusion that this literature is not from the Prophet but was

'forged' by later generations. What lies behind the scientific facade presented in most of these attacks is the *a priori* assumption that Islam is not a Divine revelation. If it is not a Divine revelation then it must be explained away in terms of factors present in seventh century Arabian society. Now, a Bedouin society could not have had any metaphysical knowledge, could not have possibly known about the Divine Word or Logos, about the higher states of being, about the structure of the Universe. Therefore, everything in Hadīth literature that speaks of these matters must be a later accretion. Were the critics of Hadīth simply to admit that the Prophet was a prophet, there would be no scientifically valid argument whatsoever against the main body of Hadīth. But this is precisely what they do not admit and therefore they have to consider as a later forgery anything in Hadīth literature which resembles the doctrines of other religions or speaks of esoteric questions.

There is of course no doubt that there are many Hadīths which are spurious. Traditional Islamic scholars themselves developed an elaborate science to examine the text of the Hadīth (*'ilm al-jarh*) and the validity of the chains of prophetic transmission (*'ilm al-dirāyah*) as well as the circumstances under which it was spoken. They sifted the sayings and compared them with detailed knowledge of the factors involved in a manner which no modern scholar can hope to match. In this manner certain sayings were accepted and other rejected as being either of dubious origin or completely unauthentic. Those who collected Hadīth were in fact the most pious and devout of men who often travelled from Central Asia to Madīnah or Iraq or Syria in search of Hadīth. Throughout Islamic history the most devout and ascetic of the religious scholars have been the scholars of Hadīth (the *muhaddithūn*), and because of the degree of piety and trust of the community that is necessary before a person is recognized as an authority in this field, they have always constituted the smallest number among all the different classes of religious scholars.

In fact what the modern critics of Hadīth do not realize in applying their so-called historical method is that they are projecting the kind of agnostic mentality prevalent in man academic circles

today on to the mentality of a traditional Muslim scholar of Hadīth. They think that for him also the questions of religion could be treated in such a 'detached' manner as to enable them even to 'forge' sayings of the Prophet or to accept them into the traditional corpus without the greatest care. They do not realize that for men of the early centuries and especially the religious scholars the fire of hell was not an abstract thought but a concrete reality. They feared God in a way which most modern men can hardly imagine and it is psychologically absurd that, with a mentality to which the alternative of Heaven or Hell is the most real thing of all, they should commit the unpardonable sin of forging prophetic sayings. Nothing is less scientific than to project the modern mentality, which is an anomaly in history, on to a period when man lived and thought in a traditional world in which the verities of religion determined life itself, and in which men sought first and foremost to perform the most important duty placed upon their shoulders, namely, to save their souls.

As to the statement made by critics of Hadīth that the forged sayings came into being in the second century A.H. and were honestly believed to be prophetic sayings by the collectors of the third century, the same answer can be given. The Sunnah of the Prophet and his sayings had left such a profound imprint upon the first generation and those that came immediately afterwards that a forging of new sayings, and therefore also new ways of action and procedure in religious questions that already possessed precedence, would have been immediately opposed by the community. It would have meant a break in the continuity of the whole religious life and pattern of Islam which in fact, is not discernible. Moreover, the Imams, whose sayings are included in the Hadīth corpus in Shi'ism and who themselves are the most reliable chain of transmission of prophetic sayings, survived after the third Islamic century, that is, after the very period of the collection of the well-known books of Hadīth, so that they bridge the period to which the modern critics point as the time of 'forgery' of Hadīth. Their very presence in fact is one more proof of the falsity of the arguments presented against the authenticity of Hadīth literature, arguments which attack not only the dubious and spurious sayings but the main body of Hadīth,

according to which Islamic society has lived and modelled itself since its inception.

The danger inherent in this criticism of the Hadīth lies in decreasing its value in the eyes of those Muslims who, having come under the sway of its arguments, accept the fatally dangerous conclusion that the body of Hadīth is not the sayings of the Prophet and therefore does not carry his authority. In this way one of the foundations of Divine Law and a vital source of guidance for the spiritual life is destroyed. It is as if the whole foundation were pulled from underneath the structure of Islam. What would be left in such a case would be the Qur'an, which, being the Word of God, is too sublime to interpret and decipher without the aid of the Prophet. Left by themselves men would in most cases read their own limitations into the Holy Book and the whole homogeneity of Muslim society and the harmony existing between the Qur'an and the religious life of Islam would be disrupted. There are few problems that call for as immediate action on the part of the Muslim community as a response by qualified, traditional Muslim authorities in scientific — but not necessarily 'scientistic' — terms to the charges brought against Hadīth literature by modern Western critics, who have now also found a few disciples among Muslims. They have found a few followers of Muslim background who have left the traditional point of view and have become enamoured by the apparently scientific method of the critics which only hides an *a priori* presumption no Muslim can accept, namely the negation of the heavenly origin of the Qur'anic revelation and the actual prophetic power and function of the Prophet.

Be it as it may, as far as traditional Islam is concerned, which alone concerns us here, the Hadīth is, after the Qur'an, the most important source of both the Law, *Shari'ah*, and the Spiritual way, *Tariqah*. And it is the vital integrating factor in Muslim society, for the daily lives of millions of Muslims the world over have been modelled upon the prophetic Sunnah and Hadīth. For nearly fourteen hundred years Muslims have tried to awaken in the morning as the Prophet awakened, to eat as he ate, to wash as he washed himself, even to cut their nails as he did. There has been no greater force for

the unification of the Muslim peoples than the presence of this common model for the minutest acts of daily life. A Chinese Muslim, although racially a Chinese, has a countenance, behaviour, manner of walking and acting that resembles in certain ways those of a Muslim on the coast of the Atlantic. That is because both have for centuries copied the same model. Something of the soul of the Prophet is to be seen in both places. It is this essential unifying factor, a common Sunnah or way of living as a model, that makes a bazaar in Morocco have a 'feeling' or *ambiance* of a bazaar in Persia, although the people in the two places speak a different language and dress differently. There is something in the air which an intelligent foreign observer will immediately detect as belonging to the same religious and spiritual climate. And this sameness is brought about firstly through the presence of the Qur'an and secondly, and in a more immediate and tangible way, through the 'presence' of the Prophet in his community by virtue of his Hadith and Sunnah.

Through the Hadith and Sunnah Muslims come to know both the Prophet and the message of the Qur'an. Without Hadith much of the Qur'an would be a closed book. We are told in the Qur'an to pray but were it not for prophetic Sunnah we would not know how to pray. Something as fundamental as the daily prayers which are the central rite of Islam would be impossible to perform without the guidance of the prophetic practice. This applies to a thousand and one other situations so that it is almost unnecessary to emphasize the vital connection between the Qur'an and the practice and sayings of the Prophet whom God chose as its revealer and interpreter to mankind.

Before terminating this discussion about the Hadith it should be pointed out that within the vast corpus of prophetic sayings there are forty which are called 'sacred sayings' (*Hadith Qudsi*) which are not a part of the Qur'an but in which God speaks in the first person through the Prophet. These sayings although small in number are of extreme importance in that they are, along with certain verses of the Qur'an, the basis of the spiritual life in Islam. Sufism is based on these sayings and many a Sufi knows them by heart and lives in

constant remembrance of their message. These sayings all concern the spiritual life rather than social or political matters. They deal with man's direct relation with God as in the famous *Hadith Qudsi* so often repeated by Sufi masters over the ages:

My slave ceaseth not to draw nigh unto Me through devotions of free-will until I love him, and when I love him, I am the hearing with which he heareth and the sight with which he seeth and the hand with which he fighteth and the foot with which he walketh.

The presence of these sayings indicate how deeply the roots of Islamic spirituality are sunk in the sources of the revelation itself. Far from being just a legal and social system devoid of a spiritual dimension, or one upon which a spiritual dimension was artificially grafted later on, Islam was, from the beginning, both a Law and a Way. The two dimensions of Islam, the exoteric and esoteric, are best demonstrated in the case of the Prophet himself who was both the perfection of human action on the social and political plane and the prototype of the spiritual life in his inner oneness with God and in his total realization in which he saw nothing except in God and through God.

The particularity of the Prophet which distinguishes him from those that came before him is that he is the last of the prophets (*khātam al-anbiyā'*), the seal of prophecy who, coming at the end of the prophetic cycle, integrates in himself the function of prophecy as such. This aspect of the Prophet immediately brings up the question of what prophecy itself means. There have been numerous volumes written by traditional Muslim authorities on this subject in which the elaborate metaphysical dimension of this central reality of religion is outlined. Although it is not possible to discuss this question in detail here one can summarize by saying that prophethood is, according to the Islamic view, a state bestowed upon men whom God has chosen because of certain perfections in them by virtue of which they become the instrument through whom God reveals His message to the world. Their inspiration is directly from Heaven. A prophet owes nothing to anyone. He is not a scholar who discerns through books certain truths, nor one who learns from other human beings and in



turn transmits this learning. His knowledge marks a direct intervention of the Divine in the human order, an intervention which is not, from the Islamic point of view, an incarnation but a theophany (*tajallī*).

This definition of prophethood holds true for every prophet, not just in the case of the founder of Islam. From the Muslim point of view Christ did not gain his knowledge of the Old Testament and the message of the Hebrew prophets by reading books or learning from rabbis but directly from heaven. Nor did Moses learn the laws and the message that he brought from older prophets, be it even Abraham. He received a new message directly from God. And if he reiterated some of the truths of the messages brought by the Semitic prophets before him or if Christ affirmed the Jewish tradition whose inner meaning he revealed — according to the well-known saying "Christ revealed what Moses veiled" — or if the Qur'an mentions some of the stories of the Old and New Testaments, none of these instances implies an historical borrowing. They indicate only a new revelation in the cadre of the same spiritual climate which can be called the Abrahamic tradition. The same applies to the *avātaras* of Hinduism who came each with a new message from Heaven but spoken in the language of the same spiritual ambience.

Although all prophecy implies a meeting of the Divine and human planes, there are degrees of prophecy dependent upon the type of message revealed and the function of the messenger in propagating that message. In fact whereas in English the single word prophet is usually used, in Arabic, Persian and other languages of the Islamic people there are a series of words connected with levels of prophethood. There is first of all the *nabī*, a man who brings news of God's message, a man whom God has chosen to speak to. But God does not just speak to any man. He who is worthy of hearing a Divine message must be qualified. He must be pure by nature. That is why according to traditional Islamic sources the body of the Prophet was made from the choicest earth. He must possess the perfection of human virtues such as goodness and nobility although in reality he has nothing of his own, everything having been given by God to him. He must have the perfection of both the

practical and theoretical faculties, a perfect imagination, an intellect that is perfectly attuned to the Divine Intellect, a psychological and corporeal structure which enables him to lead men in action and to guide them through all trials and circumstances. But the message which the *ṛabī* receives is not necessarily universal. He may receive a message which is to remain within him and not be divulged openly or is meant to be imparted to only a few in the cadre of an already existing religion.

Of the prophets in this sense (*anbiyā'*), there are, according to tradition, one hundred and twenty-four thousand whom God has sent to every nation and people, for the Qur'an asserts that there is no people unto whom a prophet has not been sent.

*And for every nation there is a messenger (10:48).*

although it also states that to each people God speaks in its own language, hence the diversity of religions:

*And We never sent a messenger save with the language of his folk (14:4).*

The universality of prophecy so clearly enunciated in the Qur'an means the universality of tradition, of religion. It means that all orthodox religions come from heaven and are not man made. It also implies by its comprehensive formulation the presence of Divine revelation not only in the Abrahamic tradition but among all nations, although in previous times this question was not explored explicitly. The Qur'an asserted the principle of universality leaving the possibility of its application outside the Semitic world as the case arose, for example, when Islam encountered Zoroastrianism in Persia or Hinduism in India. In the same manner it could be applied in modern times to the encounter with any previously unknown genuine tradition, be it that of the American Indians.

Among the *anbiyā'* there are those who belong to another category of prophets, or a new level of prophecy, namely those who not only receive a message from heaven but are also chosen to

propagate that message for the segment of humanity providentially destined for it. The prophet with such a function is called *rasūl*. He is also a *nabī* but in addition he has this function of making God's message known to men and inviting them to accept it, as is seen in the case of many prophets of the Old Testament. Above the *rasūl* stands the prophet who is to bring a major new religion to the world, the 'possessor of firmness and determination' (*ūlu'l-'azm*). Of this latter category Islam, again limiting itself to the Abrahamic Tradition, believes there have been seven, each of whom was the founder of a new religion and who brought a new Divine Law into the world. There are then altogether three grades of prophecy, that of the *nabī*, the *rasūl* and the *ūlu'l-'azm*, although in certain Islamic sources this gradation is further refined to include in further detail the degrees of *anbiyā'* who are distinguished by the manner in which they perceive the angel of revelation.

'The Prophet' was at once a *nabī*, a *rasūl* and an *ūlu'l-'azm* and brought the cycle of prophecy to a close. After him there will be no new *Sharī'ah* or Divine Law brought into the world until the end of time. There are to be no revelations (*wahy*) after him, for he marks the termination of the prophetic cycle (*dā'irat al-nubuwwah*). It may on the surface appear as a great tragedy that man seems to be thus left without any possibility of renewing the truths of the revelation through new contact with the source of the truth. But in reality the termination of the prophetic cycle does not mean that all possibility of contact with the Divine order has ceased. Whereas revelation (*wahy*) is no longer possible, inspiration (*ilhām*) remains always as a latent possibility. Whereas the cycle of prophecy (*dā'irat al-nubuwwah*) has come to an end, the cycle of *wilāyah* (*dā'irat al-wilāyah*), which for want of a better term may be translated as the 'cycle of initiation' and also sanctity, continues.

Actually *wilāyah* in this context, which should in the technical language of Islamic gnosis be distinguished from *wilāyah* in the ordinary sense having to do with the state of *walī* or saint, means the presence of this inner dimension within Islam which the Prophet inaugurated along with a new *Sharī'ah* and which will continue to the end of time. Thanks to its presence, man is able to renew himself

spiritually and gain contact with the Divine although a new revelation is no longer possible. It is due to this esoteric dimension of Islam and the grace or *barakah* contained in the organizations which are its preservers and propagators that the spiritual force of the original revelation has been renewed over the ages and the possibility of a spiritual life leading to the state of sainthood, that purifies human society and rejuvenates religious forces, has been preserved.

The Prophet in terminating the prophetic cycle and in bringing the last *Sharī'ah* into the world, also inaugurated the cycle of 'Muhammadan sanctity' (*wilāyah Muḥammadiyah*), which is ever present and which is the means whereby the spiritual energy of the tradition is continuously renewed. Therefore, far from there being a need for any new religion, which at this moment of time can only mean a pseudo-religion, the revelation brought by the Prophet contains in itself all that is needed to fulfil in every way the religious and spiritual needs of Muslims, from the common believer to the potential saint.

The Prophet, besides being the leader of men and the founder of a new civilization, is also the perfection of the human norm and the model for the spiritual life of Islam. He said "I am a human being like you" (*ana basharun mithlukum*), to which Muslim sages over the ages have added, "yes, but like a precious gem among stones" (*ka'l-yāqūt bayn al-hajār*). The profound symbolism contained in this saying is connected with the inner nature of the Prophet. All men in their purely human nature are like stones, opaque and heavy and a veil to the light that shines upon them. The Prophet also possesses this human nature outwardly. But inwardly he has become alchemically transmuted into a precious stone which, although still a stone, is transparent before the light and has lost its opacity. The Prophet is outwardly only a human being (*bashar*), but inwardly he is the full realization of manhood in its most universal sense. He is the Universal Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*), the prototype of all of creation, the norm of all perfection, the first of all beings, the mirror in which God contemplates universal existence. He is inwardly identified with the Logos and the Divine Intellect.

In every religion the founder is identified with the Logos, as we

read in the beginning of the Gospel according to John, "*In principio erat verbum*," that is, that which was in the beginning was the Word or Logos identified with Christ. Islam considers all prophets as an aspect of the Universal Logos, which in its perspective is identified with the 'Reality of Muḥammad' (*al-ḥaqīqah al-Muḥammadiyah*), which was the first of God's creation and through whom God sees all things. As the Muḥammadan reality the Prophet came before all the other prophets at the beginning of the prophetic cycle, and it is to this inner aspect of him as the Logos to which reference is made in the Hadīth:

He [Muḥammad] was prophet [the Logos] when Adam was still between water and clay.

The Sufi Najm al-Dīn al-Rāzī in his *Mirṣād al-'ibād* writes that just as in the case of a tree one first plants a seed which then grows into a plant that gives branches, then leaves, then blossoms, then fruit which in turn contains the seed, so did the cycle of prophecy begin with the Muḥammadan Reality, with the inner reality of Muḥammad, while it ended with the human manifestation of him. He thus is inwardly the beginning and outwardly the end of the prophetic cycle which he synthesizes and unifies in his being. Outwardly he is a human being and inwardly the Universal Man, the norm of all spiritual perfection. The Prophet himself referred to this inner aspect of his nature as in the Hadīth:

I am Aḥmad without the *mim* [that is, *aḥad* meaning Unity]; I am Arab without the *'ayn* [that is *rabb* meaning Lord]. Who has seen me, the same hath seen the Truth.

What do such sayings mean but the inward union of the Prophet with God. This truth has been reiterated over and over again throughout the ages by masters of Sufism as in the beautiful Persian poem from the *Gulshan-i rāz*:

A single *mim* divides Aḥad from Aḥmad  
The world is immersed in that one *mim*.

This *mīm* which separates the esoteric name of the Prophet, Ahmad, from God, is the symbol of return to the Origin, of death and reawakening to the eternal realities. Its numerical equivalence is forty which itself symbolizes the age of prophecy in Islam. The Prophet is outwardly the messenger of God to men; inwardly he is in permanent union with the Lord.

The doctrine of Universal Man which is inextricably connected with what one may call prophetology in Islam, is far from having originated as a result of later influences upon Islam. It is based rather on what the Prophet was inwardly and as he was seen by those among his Companions who, besides being his followers religiously, were the inheritors of his esoteric message. Those who wish to deprive Islam of a spiritual and intellectual dimension seek to make of this basic doctrine a later borrowing as if the Prophet could have become in an effective and operative way the Universal Man by just having such a state attributed to him if he were not so already in his real nature. It would be as if one expected a body to shine simply by calling it the sun. The Prophet possessed in himself that reality which later gained the technical name of Universal Man. But the 'named' was there long before this name was given to it, and before the theory of it was elaborated for later generations who because of elongation from the source of the revelation were in need of further explanation.

In conclusion it may be said that the Prophet is the perfection of both the human collectivity and the human individual, the norm for the perfect social life and the prototype and guide for the spiritual life. He is both the Universal Man and the Primordial Man (*al-insān al-qadīm*). As the Universal Man he is the totality of which we are a part and in which we participate; as the Primordial Man he is that original perfection with respect to which we are a decadence and a falling away. He is thus both the 'spatial' and 'temporal' norms of perfection, 'spatial' in the sense of the totality of which we are a part and 'temporal' in the sense of the perfection which was at the beginning and which we must seek to regain by moving upstream against the downward flow of the march of time.

The Prophet possessed eminently both the human (*nāsūt*) and

spiritual (*lāhūt*) natures. Yet, there was never an incarnation of the *lāhūt* into the *nāsūt*, a perspective which Islam does not accept. The Prophet did possess these two natures and for this very reason his example makes possible the presence of a spiritual way in Islam. He was the perfect ruler, judge and leader of men. He was the creator of the most perfect Muslim society in comparison with which every later society is a falling away. But he was in addition the prototype of the spiritual life. That is why it is absolutely necessary to follow in his footsteps if one aspires towards spiritual realization.

The love of the Prophet is incumbent upon all Muslims and especially upon those who aspire towards the saintly life. This love must not be understood in an individualistic sense. Rather, the Prophet is loved because he symbolizes that harmony and beauty that pervade all things, and displays in their fullness those virtues, the attainment of which allow man to realize his theomorphic nature.

*Lo! Allah and His angels shower blessings on the Prophet,  
O ye who believe! Ask blessings on him and salute him with a  
worthy salutation (33:56).*

# 12

## HADĪTH — ITS RELEVANCE TO THE MODERN TIMES

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SYED ABUL HASAN ALI NADWI

Before I throw light upon the relevance of the traditions to the religious and social life of Muslims in the modern times, let me say a few words about their significance for the believers. The sayings and doings of the Prophet not only complement the Qur'an but, being the authentic record of the Prophet's life, they lead his followers to the source of revelation and provide them access to the inner, spiritual dimension of the Prophet's teachings. Every religion which seeks to build an ideal pattern of society prescribes certain ethical rules and devotional observances for achieving that end. These are, nevertheless, only the outward manifestations of that system. Life in complete harmony with the spirit of such rules and laws can be realized only by forming and moulding the life of the followers of that religion after the perfect model of that system. In the case of Islam, this model is obviously the life of the Prophet of Islam. His sayings and doings, the minute details of his everyday life, provide us with the means of realizing the inner reality, the gist and spirit of the Islamic system of beliefs and observances.



Let us begin with the aims and effects of the mission of Prophet Muhammad. These, according to the Qur'an, consist of the following:

- i. Recitation of the revealed verses;
- ii. Teaching of the Book;
- iii. Teaching of Wisdom; and
- iv. Cleansing and Purification.

*He it is who sent among the unlettered ones a messenger of their own, to recite unto them His revelations and to make them clean, and to teach them the Scripture and Wisdom, though heretofore they were indeed in error manifest (Qur'an, 62:2).*

*Even as We have sent unto you a messenger from among you, who recites unto you Our Revelations and makes you clean, and teaches you the Scripture and Wisdom, and teaches you that which you knew not (2:151).*

Indeed, the mission of Prophet Muhammad comprehends the four above-mentioned objectives. Just as the blessed Prophet gave to mankind a new Scripture and bestowed upon it new knowledge, in the same way he granted to it new moral virtues and sentiments, a new belief and faith, a new devotion and eagerness, a new magnanimity and high-mindedness, a new spirit of self-effacement and solicitude for the Hereafter, a new ideal of contentment and contemptuous disregard of worldly goods and glory, a new concept of love and affection, compassion and kindness, and a new joy of worship and a wealth of divine fear, repentance and supplication. Upon these very characteristics was founded the entire structure of Islamic Society and from them originated the religious environment commonly known as the Era of the Prophet and the Holy Companions. The Companions were the finest result and symbols of the efforts of the Prophet as the Apostle of God. One has only to look at this august body of men for the manifestation of the various aspects of prophethood in everyday life.

The mission of the Prophet and his teachings were the fountain-

head of these blessings and the whole of Islamic life and social design of the first century of Islam stemmed from them. But if a study in depth was made of how it all came about and its ways and means were analyzed it would appear that the marvellous revolution sprang from these formative factors which worked in the new society and *Ummah*:

- i. The personality of the sacred Prophet — his life and character;
- ii. The Holy Qur'an; and
- iii. The sayings and sermons, teachings and precepts, and exhortations and admonitions of the Prophet.

The three factors, as a little thought will show, lie behind the perfect materialization of the aims and effects of the mission of Prophet Muhammad. They have played a decisive role in the making and moulding of the new *Ummah*. A complete society, a perfect life and a collective design in which beliefs and actions, moral virtues and emotions, aptitudes and inclinations and kinship and mutual relations find their due expression cannot come into existence apart from them. Life springs from life.

In our world, a lamp is lighted by another lamp. The true Islamic morality, which along with belief and action, is seen in the lives of the Companions and their faithful successors, and their lofty idealism and deep religious feeling, are not merely due to the recitation of the Book but have also been instilled by the most inspiring and lovable personality that was before them all the time. These are the effects of the life and character as well which the Holy Companions could see and observe during all the hours of day and night and of the company, discourses and exhortations from which they used to profit continually during the lifetime of the Prophet. The special temperament of Islam evolved as a result of the assemblage of all these factors in which there was not only the habitual obedience to commands and injunctions but a growth of the true spirit was characterized by the urge to act on them. Side by side with compliance with rules and regulations and the rendering of rights, this spirit also possessed the ability to conceive the subtleties of tender emotions and refined feelings.

The Companions had received the command from the Qur'an and also heard the commendation "Who are humble in their prayers". But it was only when they had offered *ṣalāt* with the Prophet and observed the state of his *rukū'* which they have described in these words:

We used to hear sounds coming from his bosom as if something was being cooked in a pot on the stove,

that they realized the true significance of it. They had learnt from the Qur'an that *ṣalāt* was the favourite occupation of a truthful believer but until they had heard the Prophet say, "The coolness of my eyes lies in *ṣalāt*," and, "O Bilal! Give the call to *ṣalāt* and bring comfort to my heart," they had no clear idea of the intensity of the attachment. They had repeatedly read in the Qur'an the exhortation to supplicate God and had also heard that He is displeased with those who do not beseech Him humbly for their needs. They were not unaware of the meaning of 'humbling one's self', 'perseverance' and 'crying' but the reality of it dawned upon them only when they saw the Prophet placing his forehead on the ground, in the Battle of Badr, and crying out to the Almighty from the depth of his heart:

O Lord! I beg thee in the name of Thy Promise and Thy Covenant. O Lord! If You decide (to destroy these handful of men) then You shalt not be worshipped.

They noticed the extreme anguish of Abū Bakr which forced him to cry out "O Messenger of God! It is enough". They knew that the essence of supplication lay in humbleness and submission and an entreaty was precious to the extent to which it possessed these attributes, but the real import of 'humbleness' and 'submission' was perceived by them only when they heard the Prophet making this prayer at 'Arafah:

O Lord! Thou heareth what I say and seeth where I am and in whatever state. Thou knowest what is secret and what is manifest in me, and naught concerning me is hidden from Thee. I am in distress,

a beggar. I beg Thee for protection and succour. Thy fear is gripping me. I confess my sins. I entreat Thee like a poor, helpless suppliant. I beseech Thee like a wretched sinner. I implore Thee like an afflicted, awe-stricken slave — a slave whose head is bowed before Thee, "whose tears are flowing in Thy presence, and whose body is bent (in utter submission), — a slave who is lying prostrate on the ground begging and imploring and crying his heart out. O Lord! Do not reject my prayer. Have mercy on me. O Thou, the Best and Most Excellent of Givers, and the Noblest of Helpers.

They had read in the Qur'an about the worthlessness of this world and the permanence of the Hereafter. They knew by heart the verse, "The life of the world is but a pastime and a game. Lo! the home of the Hereafter — that is Life." But they could comprehend its fundamental significance and be acquainted with its practical interpretation solely from the life of the Prophet. It was only by observing his way of living and the painfully low level of material comfort that prevailed in his household that they felt what was meant by considering the life after death to be the real existence. His day-to-day life reflected the motto:

O Lord! There is no joy other than the joy of Futurity.

When from this brief exhortation and practical life-pattern they came to know about the details of the cloudless joys and comforts of Paradise and endless torture of Hell from the Prophet, they were seized with the mixed feelings of fear and eagerness and the picture of both the ultimate resting places remained constantly alive before their eyes.

Likewise, they were well-acquainted with the meanings of moral virtues like compassion, humility, affability and gentleness but they realized the full scope of their implication, their application in real life and the proper ways and occasions of putting them into practice only when they had an experience of the behavior of the Prophet towards the weak and the indigent, and towards his own friends and companions, family members and domestic servants, and heard his exhortations and admonitions in that regard. They had received the

command from the Qur'an to fulfill the rights of the general body of Muslims but its numerous forms like visiting the sick, attending the funeral and making a prayer for the welfare of anyone who sneezed were such that most of the people could, perhaps, not think of them on their own. Similarly, the Qur'an has enjoined kindness to parents and to others who have a claim, but how many moral teachers have dreamt of the lofty standard held out in the following Tradition:

The highest grade of the loyalty and kindliness of a son towards his parents is that, after their death, he showed affection to their friends and behaved with them in a benevolent and obliging manner.

Few have attained the level of gentlemanliness in social conduct shown in this Hadith:

When a goat was slaughtered in the Prophet's house he would often get it cut into pieces and send the pieces of meat to ladies who were the friends of his deceased wife, Khadijah.

From these few examples drawn from the Hadith of the Prophet's sayings and doings one can imagine the guidance the traditions furnish in different branches of life, what new knowledge they impart and what a treasure-house they constitute for humanity.

On the other hand, the history of religions and communities bears witness to the fact that mere legislation is not enough to bring about a deed in its true spirit and to create the atmosphere that is needed to make it effective and purposeful. For instance, the brief command to establish prayers cannot produce the inner feeling that helps in the preservation of its form and spirit, encourages its regular observance and leads to the attainment of the desired moral, spiritual and collective results. For it, rules and principles, guidance and proprieties are needed that lend grandeur and effectiveness to the act. The essential conditions of ablution, cleanliness, understanding, humbleness, peace and calmness have been laid in the Qur'an for this very reason. It should not be hard to appreciate that the proper climate in which the fruits of *salāt* are borne forth and its moral, spiritual and collective benefits accrue, will be generated in

proportion to the attention paid to these requisites and formalities.

Students of the *Hadīth* of the Prophet will be aware that his precepts and sayings have made the *salāt* a most efficacious means of inner purification, moral uplift and God-consciousness as well as a means for training and instruction of the *Ummah* and for the promotion of discipline and solidarity in it. From him we have learned the virtues of ablution and precise formulation of intention, the importance of going to the mosque, the prayer of the way, the correct manner of entering the mosque and the formula of God-remembrance, the salutation of the mosque (meaning practices firmly established by the conduct of the Holy Prophet), the virtue of waiting in the mosque for *salāt*, the reward of congregation, the reward of *adhān* (call to prayer) and *Iqāmah* (second call to prayer uttered immediately before the commencement of the *fard* prayer), the office of *Imāmah* and the requirement to follow the Imam implicitly, the arrangement of rows, the excellence of people sitting together for the recitation of the Names, Praises and Attributes of the Lord and for religious education and instruction, the correct way of coming out of the mosque and the special prayer for the occasion, etc. Add to it the condition of the Prophet's *salāt*, his enthusiasm for the supererogatory prayers and the description of his absorption in prayer and lamentation during the recitation of the Qur'an (which have been described in detail in the Traditions) and you will see what a high degree of excellence the *salāt* of the *Ummah* acquired and how wonderful is the intellectual and emotional atmosphere that is generated by it. On the same basis, think of the other obligatory duties of *sawm* (fasting), *zakāt* (poor-due) and Hajj (Pilgrimage) and judge for yourself how far they can retain their effectiveness and the ability to stir the deepest feelings of the devotees, and prove helpful in the building up of a new society, if these acts of worship are shorn of the virtues and formalities mentioned in the Traditions and isolated from the atmosphere we have just indicated.

The life, precepts and sayings of the Prophet, in reality, provide the climate for Faith in which it thrives and bears fruit. Religion is not the name of a soulless dogma or wooden ethical code. It cannot endure without genuine emotions, solid facts and practical examples.

The best and most reliable collection of these feelings, events and instances is the one related to the personality of the sacred Prophet and derived from the record of his life. Judaism, Christianity and other Asian faiths became crippled so soon because they did not possess an authentic record of the precepts and practices of their Prophets. The atmosphere in which adherents prosper morally and spiritually and withstand successfully the onslaughts of godlessness and materialism was not available to them. They, ultimately, tried to fill the void with the accounts of the lives and attainments of saints and holy men and their discourses and utterances, but succeeded only in reducing religion to a package of innovations, rituals and ingenious interpretations. The hollowness of these faiths and communities, as regards reliable life-records of their Prophets, is a historical fact upon which a great deal has been written already. One of the proofs of Islam being the last and eternal religion is that it was never overtaken by such a disaster. The intellectual and spiritual environment in which the Companions of the prophet spent their lives has been preserved in its pristine purity for all time to come through the *Hadīth*. Thanks to them, it is quite possible for anyone belonging to the succeeding generations to break away instantly from his own surroundings and begin to live in the environment in which the Prophet himself is present — he is speaking to the Companions and the Companions are listening to him intently. Forms of action are seen side by side with precepts, and episodes of feeling alongwith forms of action — an environment in which an idea can be formed of the kind of deeds and morals that originate from Faith and the design of life that is determined by belief in the Hereafter. It is a window through which the family life of the Prophet, the house where he lived, the usual way in which he spent his nights, and the level of material comforts enjoyed by the members of his household can be distinctly viewed. The state of his genuflection can be seen with the eyes, and the melody of his hymns and prayers can be heard with the ears. How, then, can anyone be guilty of negligence who sees the Prophet's eyes overflowing with tears and feet swollen, and hears him protesting earnestly, "Am I not grateful bondsman of the Lord?" How can they be in two minds about the worthlessness of

this world? And how can they remain unmoved by the call of asceticism when they can 'see' that fire was not lighted in the Prophet's house for as many as two months on end or when they observe the stone tied to his stomach, the marks of the mat on his back, the remainder of the gold meant for charity being spent anxiously in the path of God before retiring to bed and the oil for the lamp being borrowed from the neighbour during the last illness? Where would one go for a lesson in nobility of mind and character who has seen the Prophet attending upon the members of his family, showing affection to his children, leniency to his servants, kindness towards the Companions and forbearance and compassion towards the enemies?

In fact, not only is the door of the Prophet's dwelling open in this atmosphere through which all this is seen by the viewers but also the doors of the dwellings of the blessed Companions, as is everything else — their style of living, the burning of their hearts, the ardour of their nights, their activity and occupation in the market and ease and tranquility in the mosque, their devoutness and self-surrender, the ceaseless attacks of the carnal desires on them, their whole-hearted submission to the Almighty and their human weaknesses — is visible. Here the glorious self-denial of Abū Talhah Ansārī meets the eye as well as the unique incident of Ka'ab b. Mālīk's staying away from the Battle of Tabūk. In brief, it is a natural environment in which life is present in its true colours and the manifold facets of human personality are on display, and the Hadīths of the Prophet have made all this safe for eternity by painting a vivid picture of the Era of the Apostle in its minutest details.

The preservation of the historical portrait of the Era of the Prophet along with that of the Companions is an achievement of the Muslims of which they can justly be proud. It is unequalled in the annals of religions and communities. A faith that has to endure till the end of time and provide proper incentive to action and wholesome nourishment to the heart and mind cannot remain alive and active without the environment that is peculiar to it. This environment has been preserved till Doomsday by means of the



Hadīth. The history of the collection and compilation of the Hadīth emphatically shows that it was not a chance occurrence. The attention of the Companions was drawn towards writing down the Hadīth even during the Prophet's lifetime and a large part of the sayings was preserved by them. Then, the compilation and arrangement of the Hadīth narratives was the task of their immediate successors. Thousands of scholars and researchists studied and worked all the way to Iran, Khurāsān and Turkestan. Their phenomenal memory, resoluteness and dedication, the birth of the masters of *Asmā' al-Rijāl* (a most important branch of Hadīth literature which was created as an aid to the formal criticism of the Hadīth) and the science of narration, and, finally, the enduring interest of the *Ummah* in the subject and its popularity and propagation in the whole of the Islamic World — all these facts go to prove that like the preservation of the Qur'an, the preservation of the Hadīth, too, was willed by God. In his infinite wisdom, the Lord had decided that the reports of the sayings and practices of the Prophet be collected and made safe forever. It was due to it that the continuity of the Glorious Life was maintained and the moral, spiritual and academic legacy the Companions had inherited directly went on reaching the *Ummah* during all the stages of its history. In this way, the process of 'succession' continued not only in respect of beliefs and injunctions but in the emotional and temperamental fields as well. The mental and emotional disposition of the age of the Companions was duly transmitted from one generation and class to another because of the Hadīth.

In the long and chequered history of the *Ummah* this quality and temperament never left it altogether — it did not become wholly extinct at any time — and there were always found in it men who could be said to possess the nature and disposition of the Companions. The same passion for worship, the same piety and devoutness, the same constancy and steadfastness, the same humility and introspection of the self, the same ardour for the Hereafter, the same detachment from the material world, the same fervour for sanctioning what was lawful and prohibiting what was forbidden, the same revulsion for innovations and the same keenness to follow the

doings and practices of the Prophet which are the fruits of the study of the Traditions and of keeping company with those who have received illumination from the bosom of the sacred Apostle are evident in them. The mental and emotional disposition of the *Ummah* has endured from the first century of Islam to the modern materialistic times. From Sufyān Thawrī, ‘Abdullāh b. Mubārak and Imam Ahmad b. Hanbal to Mawlānā Fazlur Rahmān Ganj Moradabadi, Mawlānā Rashīd Ahmad Gangohi and Mawlānā Syed ‘Abdullāh Ghaznavi we have an unbroken chain of its glowing symbols. As long as the matchless stock of the Hadīth remains and the process of benefitting from it continues, the true disposition and temperament of the *Ummah* in which solicitude for the Hereafter is dominant over attachment to the present world, the confirmed practice of the Prophet over custom, and spiritualism over materialism will endure. It will never be that the Muslims, as a whole, fell a victim to gross materialism or got immersed altogether in innovations, worldliness and rejection of the life to come. On the contrary, under its influence, reformatory movements will always be at work and the process of renovation will continue in the *Ummah* and one group or another will at all time be striving in it for the promotion of Sunnah and *Shari‘ah*.

These who want to deprive the *Ummah* of this priceless source of life, vitality and guidance, and seek to undermine faith in its genuineness and reliability do not realise what a grievous disservice they are doing to the Muslims. They do not know that their efforts can end up only in making the *Ummah* rootless and wayward exactly in the same way as the enemies of Judaism and Christianity and the vicissitudes of time have played havoc with these great religions. If they are doing it deliberately, no one can be a greater antagonist of Islam for there is no other way of reviving and recreating the temperament and fundamental inclination that was the grand peculiarity of the holy Companions. It can either be produced directly from the company of the Prophet or indirectly through the Hadīths which are a living portrait of that era and an eloquent record of the life of the Prophet.

# THE PLACE OF THE PROPHET OF ISLAM IN IQBĀL'S THOUGHT

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ANNEMARIE SCHIMMEL

A. Jeffery writes in his interesting article on Ibn 'Arabī's *Shajarat al-Kawn*, that

many years ago . . . the late Shaykh Mustafā al-Marāghī remarked on a visit to his friend the Anglican Bishop in Egypt, that the commonest cause of offence, generally unwitting offence, given by Christians to Muslims, arose from their complete failure to understand the very high regard all Muslims have for the person of their Prophet.<sup>1</sup>

The fact that Muḥammad has been depicted in European controversial literature from the Middle Ages up to very recent times in the most depraving manner, and that it took the non-Muslim world centuries to describe him and his work with justice, has perhaps unconsciously clouded the mind of students and scholars from understanding the great importance of Muḥammad for Muslim religious life.

Even the average European Orientalist is often unaware of the

reverence in which the Prophet is held in Islamic countries; and Constance Padwick has acutely said:

No one can estimate the power of Islam as a religion who does not take into account the love at the heart of it for this figure (i.e., the Prophet). It is here that human emotion, repressed at some point by the austerity of the doctrine of God as developed in theology, has its full outlet — a warm human emotion which the peasant can share with the mystic. The love of this figure is perhaps the strongest binding force in a religion which has so marked a binding power . . . <sup>2</sup>

Whole books are devoted to the embroidering of the short sentence of the Blessings upon the Prophet, many of them famous in Muslim devotion, from West Africa to Indonesia, like the *Dalā'il al-Khayrāt* and the formula of Blessing itself is being used sometimes just as a magic spell.

"Only a human to whom was revealed" — that is the idea the Qur'an gives of the Prophet, and there is no doubt that Muslim theology and Muslim piety have always strived to maintain the human personality of Muhammad the Prophet in contrast to the term 'Son of God' which seemed to express for them the greatest deviation from true religion of the Christian neighbours; and as long as Muhammad is mentioned by millions of tongues every day as *Rasūl Allāh* in the witness formula, there is no danger of his deification. Yet, as a human the Prophet Muhammad has been described in the words of the Qur'an itself, and through the numerous traditions which depict him in all his humanity, there was, from the very beginning of Islamic history, a strong tendency to emphasize his personal traits to attribute miracles to him, and in a slow but intense development which has been shown excellently by Tor Andrae in his famous study *Die Person Muhammads in Glauben und Lehre seiner Gemeinde* (Stockholm 1918), the veneration of the Prophet reached mystical heights. Starting from certain verses of the Qur'an, Muhammad's future rank as *shāfi'*, intercessor for his followers on the Day of Judgment, became one of the centres of popular piety: it is he whom the sorrowful implore, on him is the hope that they may be released from the fire of Hell, and enter the

presence of God, and already in rather early mystical theology the greatness and pre-eternity of Muhammad is maintained, for instance, in the *Kitab al-Tawāsin* of Hallāj (d. 922 A.D.).

It is quite natural that the repetition of Muhammad's name in the second part of the Confession of Faith, just after the name of God, led to the conclusion that his spiritual place was far above that of other beings, that he was prior to Creation, and that the worlds would not have been created but for his sake. The *Hadith Qudsi lawlāka* — "If thou werest not, I would not have created the spheres" — has become, in mystical literature and poetry, a widely used *chiffre* for the Prophet's pre-eternal glory. This mystical theology was crowned by the idea that Muhammad was the *insān al-kāmil*, the Perfect Man *par excellence*, the central point in which divine and human spheres meet, the source of light from which the lights of all the other prophets have emerged.

It seems that approximately from the 12th century onwards a new side of Muhammad-veneration became more and more popular — at least we do not yet know how long it was already in use to celebrate the *mawlūd*, the birthday of the Prophet, for which poets and mystics composed heart-felt hymns and which was, in some periods, a real popular festival with illuminations of towns, etc. The *mawlūds*, which were composed for these occasions, are still extant — it is sufficient to mention the most famous example of this kind of poetry in Turkey, Suleymān Celebī's (d. 1429 A.D.) *mawlūd-i sharīf* which is still living in the hearts of almost all Turks, and which is recited not only on the birthday of the Prophet on 12 Rabī I but also as a kind of Soul's Mass at the 40th day after death and at the anniversary of death. There are *mawlūds* all over the Islamic world, and in their simple verses and their loving devotion, they belong to the most touching expressions of Islamic religious life. Also, poets used to put at the beginning of the works — after the poetical praise of God — the *na't*, a praise-poem in honour of the Prophet, which also developed into a poetical form in its own right; still is the *na't* of Mawlānā Rūmī well-known in Turkey and the countries where Rūmī's mystical poetry is read. So Iqbāl is perfectly right when he puts the praise of the Prophet into Rūmī's mouth and

makes him describe the greatness of the Seal of Prophets.<sup>3</sup>

The mystical tradition about the Prophetic virtues has lived in India as strong as elsewhere; to mention only one example: in the folklore of a comparatively small Province like Sind, the *mawlūds*, the versified stories of the miracles of the Prophet, the prayers which were addressed to him since centuries, fill large volumes, and in many cases the Western reader could simply replace the name of Muhammad by that of Christ, and could, then, recite the same poem for himself.

But in this mystical atmosphere the knowledge of the real human life of Muhammad had been nearly forgotten. Not earlier than the last decades of the 19th century the Indian Muslim intelligentsia felt the necessity — as a counter-weight against the Christian missionary activities — to inform their fellow-Muslims about the life and deeds of the historical Prophet. Classical sources, like the *Life of Muhammad* by Ibn Hishām, the collection of traditions, were largely used. Syed Ameer Ali's famous work "*The Spirit of Islam*" is essentially called "The Life of Muhammad", and its importance for a new presentation of the Prophet as the unsurpassable model of behaviour cannot be estimated too highly. Then followed the great *Biography of the Prophet* by Mawlānā Shiblī — the first monumental work on this topic in Urdu which was completed (in 5 vols.) by Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī, Iqbāl's venerated friend, and was partly translated also in other Indian vernaculars. All over the Islamic world more biographies of Muhammad written by Muslim scholars were published in recent decades than in the same number of centuries, and still this interest in the historical figure of the Prophet is continuing. In 1920, a special *strat*-movement was started in India which aimed at the publication of books and pamphlets on the Prophet for distribution among the population especially in the Punjab.

Also certain later mystical orders, in order to avoid pantheistic trends in Sufism, — like the movement of Sayyid Ahmad Brélawī in India and the *Tariqah Muḥammadiyah* of the Tijānī or the *Mirghānīyah* in North Africa — taught as the highest goal the unification of the soul not with God but with the essence of the

Prophet.

These two currents: the mystical veneration of the Prophet and the investigation of his life in order to show the Muslims that they, just as the Muslim community in times of old, should live in complete harmony with the way of life, the behaviour and the ideal which Muhammad had put before the Faithful: these two currents together form the basis of Muḥammad Iqbāl's prophetology which is sounding like a *basso ostinato* through his work in the different periods of his life. He says:

The dust of Madīnah and Najaf is collyrium for my eyes.<sup>4</sup>

Although some other problems which are most vividly expressed in Iqbāl's poetry and his philosophical work are rarely touched in his letters, the love for the Lord of Beings is felt in his private correspondence, too, and his friends tell that he often was shedding tears from emotion when the Prophet's name was mentioned. The visit of 'Abd al-Majīd Qurashī, the founder of the *sīrat*-movement, in 1929 was most welcomed by him,<sup>5</sup> and in the same year he mentions with satisfaction the fact that the Birthday of the Prophet had been celebrated by the Muslims in South India.

In order to bind together the Islamic nations of India the most holy personality of the honoured Prophet can constitute as our greatest and most efficient power.<sup>6</sup>

Iqbāl's poetry, too, turns to the Prophet often in a new and unexpected way, and the role of Muhammad is important from the *Asrār* up to the *Armaghān*; perhaps with the exception of *Payām-i Mashriq* where — except the introduction — only merely literary allusions to the Prophet are found. There is the tune of perfect trust in the Prophet which is characteristic of the normal Muslim devotions:

Thy love is greater for the rebels —  
It is, in forgiving sins, like the love of a mother.<sup>7</sup>

It is however worth mentioning that one side of the Prophet which is most frequently focussed by other poets, and especially in folk-poetry, and which makes him so dear to all fearful souls, is not often met with in Iqbal's poetical works: it is his role as *shāfi*, as intercessor at Doomsday. Though, in the *Asrār*<sup>8</sup> the poet sings:

In him is our trust on the Day of Judgment, and in this world too he is our protector;

this tune is scarcely repeated, since Muhammad Iqbal's conception of death, resurrection and final judgment in the later stages of his theological thought widely differs from the accustomed theological and popular beliefs and dogmatic details. However, his confidence in every human affair rested upon the Prophet whom he had asked, in the end of *Rumūz* (p. 193 ff.) to grant him the power of activity. It is rather significant that during his last long illness when he was staying at Bhopal he saw in a dream the reformer Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khān — the grandfather of his host — who advised him to tell his illness to the Prophet,<sup>9</sup> and indeed Iqbal composed a long poem<sup>10</sup> in which he, after having described the sad situation of the Muslims, asks the Prophet to help him in his illness — just as seven centuries ago the Egyptian al-Būṣīrī (d. 1296 A.D.) had composed his famous *Qasīdat al-Burdah* in honour of Muhammad, and was cured: an example which has become a model for pious Muslims throughout the centuries.

"Interior medicine for me is only that I recite blessings (*durūd*) on your ancestor (i.e., Muhammad)" he writes, in 1935, to a Sayyid<sup>11</sup> — but even this recitation is felt by him to be a daring work:

from shame my body became like water —

Love said: Oh you who are subjects to others . . .

As long as you have not yet got colour and scent from Muhammad, don't dirty his name with your blessings.<sup>12</sup>

Muhammad was for Iqbal the visible tide of God's activity. God could not be seen by mortal eyes — as the Qur'an says: *lan tarāni*



(thou wilt not see Me), whereas this word is not applicable to the Prophet:<sup>13</sup>

God is my Hidden One, thou art my Open One!  
With God I talk in veils, with Thee openly!<sup>14</sup>

And according to an apocryphal tradition, quoted by Rūmī and many other mystics, "Who sees me, sees God" the poet turns to the Prophet for help as well as for praise.<sup>15</sup>

Just as the Muslim feels the nearness of God when reciting the Qur'an, Iqbāl admits to have felt a spiritual connection with the Prophet when working on the subject of Islamic history, and history of Islamic law:<sup>16</sup>

The differences of juristic questions and the argumentations of the jurists of Islam in which the love of the Seal of Apostleship is concealed — the study of all these things gives me an endless spiritual delight.<sup>17</sup>

And how much more the presence of something which was said to have belonged to the Prophet! The exhibition of the *khirqah-i sharīf*, the cloak of the Prophet, at Qandahār during his visit to Afghanistan inspired Iqbāl to one of the finest Persian hymns<sup>18</sup> in which he compares his heart to Gabriel who was able to see the Prophet in flesh, and tells how his heart started singing and dancing and reciting poetry in front of the sacred relic.

The cloak of the "bar which both of them do not transgress". (*Sūrah* 55:20).

I saw it in the light of "I have two cloaks,"  
His religion and his ritual are the effect of the All  
In his forehead is writ the destination of everything.

It goes without saying that a visit to the Prophet's tomb — combined with the performance of the duty of pilgrimage — was one of Iqbāl's greatest and most ardent wishes from early times onward.<sup>19</sup> To die in the blessed country of the Hijāz — that was his dream during war-

time,<sup>20</sup> and not without reason his posthumous poems have been called Gift of the Hijāz (*Armaghān-i Hijāz*). His letters in the last years of his life are full of sentences which express the nostalgia for the Prophet's country most ardently, and he was sure that a visit to that place would bring innumerable spiritual benefits to the visitor.<sup>21</sup> He had intended to go to Madīnah on his way back from Europe in 1932, but was of the opinion

that it would be bad manners to dare visit the Holy Presence of Prophethood in connection with a journey made for worldly purposes.<sup>22</sup>

He wrote, then, the great ode to the Prophet which ends with the line:

Thou art the Preserved Tablet, and Thou art the Pen.<sup>23</sup>

The more painful his illness grew, the stronger was the wish to visit the Holy Places.

What other place is there left for sinners like me but the threshold of the Prophet?<sup>24</sup>

and even in the last months before his death he did not give up hope that

I can perform the pilgrimage in the following year and be also present in the Presence of Prophethood and bring from there such a gift that the Muslims of India will remember it.<sup>25</sup>

But that dream was not fulfilled — only a whole chapter of the quatrains in *Armaghān-i Hijāz* is called "In the Presence of the Prophet."

In Muhammad — whom he, as most of the mystic poets, often calls with his surname Mustafā, the Chosen One — Iqbal saw the source of everything good and useful in human life; poverty (in the religious sense, according to the tradition "My poverty is my pride")

and sovereignty belong to the manifestations of Mustafā,<sup>26</sup> he is the model for every Muslim,<sup>27</sup> the visible witness of God's beauty and power. His way is the only way to choose<sup>28</sup> for the Muslims of this century who are strangers to his beauty.<sup>29</sup> This idea, which animates the quatrains of the *Armaghān*, is expressed as early as the *Jawāb-i Shikwah* in 1913, where God is made to say:

Thou a Muslim art, and Destiny thy edict must obey, Be thou faithful  
to Muḥammad and We yield Ourselves to thee — Not this world alone  
— the Tablet and the Pen thy prize will be.

From here we reach the mystical ideas of Muḥammad's pre-existence, and can understand, in the light of the development of mystical praise, the great hymn which Iqbāl has sung in honour of him who is the perfect manifestation of Love.<sup>30</sup> Already in the *Asrār*, when showing that "Self is strengthened by Love" Iqbāl turns to the person of the Prophet:

There is a beloved hidden within thine heart . . .  
By love of him the heart is made strong . . .  
In the Muslim-s heart is the home of Muḥammad,  
All our glory is from the name of Muḥammad.

The idea that Muḥammad's name<sup>31</sup> itself is holy which is common in Muslim piety, is already found in the *Jawāb-i Shikwah*:

Light the world, too long in darkness, with Muḥammad's radiant  
name!

It is a common idea in all religions that the name of a thing designates the thing itself, and that to possess the name means to possess the thing itself. Name contains a certain power, a *barakah*, and that is the reason for calling so many children with the name of the Prophet in order to make them participate of the Prophet's spiritual power — but it is also the reason for the taboo on pronouncing the name Muḥammad in Turkey, and its being changed into Mehmet, lest the most holy name be polluted by daily use and

misuse.

In the *Asrār* Iqbāl says:

Eternity is less than a moment of his time  
Eternity receives increase from his essence.  
He slept on a mat of rushes  
But the crown of Chosroes was under his peoples' feet . . .

And more than 20 years later the poet goes on in the same strain:

He is the meaning of Gabriel and the Qur'an  
He is the watchman of the wisdom of God,  
His wisdom is higher than reason . . . <sup>32</sup>

In the *Rumūz*, which is, essentially, the treasure-house of Iqbāl's prophetology, he compares Muhammad to "the lamp in the darkness of Being. . .," who *was* when Adam was still in water and clay,<sup>33</sup> alluding to a famous tradition which the mystics have used in order to indicate the pre-existence of Muhammad: "I was a prophet while Adam was still between water and clay" i.e., not yet made.

One of the most beautiful and significant passages in honour of the Prophet is found in the *Jāwīd-nāmah* in the scene in the Heaven of Jupiter, where Hallāj teaches Iqbāl the secrets of Prophethood. In these verses, Iqbāl's ideas about the spiritual and mystical personality of Muhammad are expressed with perfect clearness. That he has chosen Hallāj as the interpreter of his ideas is due to the fact that this mystic had made the first substantial contribution to the Muhammad-mysticism, and some formulae of the Iqbālian poems may have been translated or at least inspired by the passages in Hallāj's *Kitāb al-Tawāsīn*, especially *Tāsīn al-Širāj* which was with Iqbāl since the First World War, and which he had studied with increasing interest and understanding.

"His Slave" is higher than thy understanding,  
Since he is both man and essence.  
His essence is neither Arabic nor Persian,  
He is a man, and yet previous to Adam.

"His Slave" is the painter of destinations,  
 In him is the repair of ruins.  
 "His Slave" is soul-giving and soul-taking,  
 "His Slave" is both bottle and hard stone.  
 "Slave" is different, and "His Slave" is different.  
 We are completely waiting, he is the waited for.  
 "His Slave" is Time, and Time is from "His Slave",  
 We all are colours, he is without colour and scent.  
 "His Slave" is without beginning, without end,  
 "His Slave" — where is for him morning and evening?  
 Nobody is acquainted with the secrets of "His Slave",  
 "His Slave" is nothing but the secret of "but God".

That Muhammad is conceived both as man and as essence shows the relation with Ibn 'Arabī's and Jīlī's ideas of the Perfect Man who unites in himself the aspects of the divine and the worldly life. And why the stress which is laid on the expression "His Slave"? According to old mystical traditions which are found already in the earliest writings on Sufism,<sup>34</sup> like Qushayrī's *Risālah*, and which was very common in Sufi circles and not the least in India, as the example of the Punjabi mystic Bullhē Shāh shows. 'Abduh, "His servant" shows the highest rank of the Prophet because this term is used in the Qur'an in connection with the ascension of Muhammad — "Praised be He who travelled at night with His servant" (*Sūrah* 17:1) — and since the night-journey means the culmination of Muhammad's role as Prophet, being brought in to Divine presence without veils, the term 'abduh hints at the highest degree of prophethood, and, consequently, the highest rank man can attain; not 'sonship' of God, but the rank of the faithful servant is the highest goal.<sup>35</sup> Iqbāl is, in these lines, completely in agreement with the great Indian theologian whom he considered to be one of the most important figures in Islamic history, Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindī (d. 1624), who held that the highest experience of annihilation is only transient, and that the mystic has to come back to the stage of 'abdīyah or servitude which is the *summum bonum* of the spiritual life of one who believes in a transcendental God. We may also quote another personality whose influence on Iqbāl has not yet been

examined but whose ideas display many similarities: it is Mīr Dard (1720-1784)<sup>36</sup>, who has expounded a mystical theory of his own which he called *'ilm-i Ilāhī Muḥammadi* — knowledge of God based on the teaching of Muḥammad — in which he calls those men real unitarians who remain, in spite of their divine vision, "slaves of God". And so, for Iqbāl, too, not only the secret of the Prophet lies concealed in the word "His Slave", but also the secret of every man — for man has developed his spiritual faculties in such a way that he may come closest to the ideal of the Prophet in his aspect as Perfect Man. In the aspect of "His Slave" — the Prophet teaches man the mystery of the tradition, "I have a time with God", starting from the experience of ascension, i.e. the immediate contact with God — the famous word which has formed a favourite basis for meditation for innumerable mystics, since it points to the experience of human communion with God, when the spell of time is broken, and eternity is realized already in this life. So, the aspect of His Slave is the model for man in his aspirations towards perfection, in which his hand, like that of Muḥammad 'becomes God's hand, the moon is split by his fingers'.<sup>37</sup> The same chapter in the *Jāwīd-nāmah* contains another description of the Prophet which is more complicated. The Qur'an has described Muḥammad as *Rahmatan li'l 'Ālamīn*, Mercy for the Worlds (*Sūrah* 21:107), and this phrase has been used often as diagram for the Prophet and his activities. That is also the case in a verse of Ghālib, the great Indo-Muslim poet of the early 19th century who had written a *mathnawī* about the question whether God could create another Muḥammad or not:

Wherever a tumult of the worlds arises,  
There is also a Mercy for the worlds.

Iqbāl was fascinated by this verse, but a letter to Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī<sup>38</sup> in 1922 shows that he had difficulties in finding out its right meaning. He concludes: "The present astronomers say that in some stars human beings and creatures of even higher order may live. If it is like that, then the manifestation of a Mercy for the Worlds is necessary there too. In this manner the transmigration or *burūz* would be least necessary for the Muslims. Suhrawardī, the *shaykh* of

the *Ishrāq* (illumination) philosophy, was in a way convinced of the transmigration of soul . . . ." This might lead to unexpected consequences for the finality of Prophethood, and so Iqbāl has left this idea when he inserts the verse — quoted by Ghālib in the Jupiter-Sphere — into the *Jāwīd-nāmah* ten years later, though he is well aware that these lines, if continued, may prove dangerous. Ghālib is made to answer (alluding to *Sūrah* 87:2) i.e.,

Creation, Destiny and Guidance are the beginning —  
"Mercy for the Worlds" is the end;

i.e., the finality of Muhammad's Prophethood is maintained, but Ghālib himself thinks that further investigations of the meaning of this verse might lead to "infidelity which lies behind poetry". Anyhow, by the attribution of this verse to its real author Ghālib it becomes clear why this poet — who was neither very religious nor a heretic — is put into the same Sphere as the great heretics Hallāj and Tāhīrah. Iqbāl would rather — as we can gather from other poems — accept this appearance of the Mercy for the Worlds as the single manifestation of the Muhammadan Reality (similar to *Jīlī*) though this expression, so dear to mystics, does not occur in his work.

But Muhammad is more than the individual soul "who has given faith to this handful dust,"<sup>39</sup> more than a mystic light illuminating this dark world — he is the leader of the community of the Faithful, the model not only of personal behaviour but that of political conduct — "who with the key of religion opened the door of this world"<sup>40</sup> — a poetical statement which is completely to the point. It is interesting to read the discussion between Iqbāl and his friend Sulaymān Nadwī about the role of the Prophet in worldly and religious affairs. Iqbāl had asked him about the *ijtihād-i Nabawī*, i.e. the power of deciding juridical or other matters outside the Qur'an,<sup>41</sup> and Nadwī replied that the "prophetic intelligence is higher than normal human intelligence" and that the Prophet is guided in his decisions towards the absolutely right way. This faculty enabled him to become the divinely guided leader of his community, and more than anything else it is this political role which Iqbāl has underlined in his picture

of the Prophet. Contrasting him with the self-centred recluse, the mystic who is not interested in social life, he shows in vivid colours how the prophets have always emerged from re-treatment and given a proper shape to political and social events, and how Muhammad has fulfilled this prophetic mission completely:

On his forehead is writ the destiny of nations.<sup>42</sup>

Taking into consideration the idea of Sprenger that Muhammad was a psychopath, Iqbāl says ironically:

Well, if a psychopath has the power to give a fresh direction to the course of human history, it is a point of the highest psychological interest to search his original experience which has turned slaves into leaders of men, and has inspired the conduct and shaped the career of whole races of mankind. Judging from the various types of activity that emanated from the movement initiated by the Prophet of Islam, his spiritual tension and the kind of behaviour which issued from it, cannot be regarded as a response to a mere fantasy inside the brain. It is impossible to understand it except as a response to an objective situation generative of new enthusiasms, new organizations, new starting points. If we look at the matter from the standpoint of anthropology it appears that a psychopath is an important factor in the economy of humanity's social organization . . .<sup>43</sup>

Iqbāl has seen — and he is perfectly right here — that the peculiarity of the prophetic mission consists of freeing the people from the traditional concepts of life, to pass from *Volks*-religion to *Welt*-religion, and that means in the case of Muhammad "to oppose, with energetic consistency, those tenets of the Arabian philosophy of life",<sup>44</sup> and to form a spiritual community which is no longer bound to prejudices of race, blood or colour. Iqbāl has poetically depicted this side of Muhammad's activity in the *Tāsīn-i Muhammad*, in the *Jāwīd-nāmah*, where the doctrines of the Prophet are reflected through the reaction of Abū Jahl, one of his grimmest enemies at Makkah:



We are utterly heart-sick because of Muhammad;  
His teachings have put out the lights of the Ka'bah!

\* \* \* \*

His religion abolishes distinctions of race and blood,  
Though himself from Quraysh, he disowns the superiority of the Arabs

In his religion the high and low are but one  
He ate out of the same dish with his slave!

To leave earth-rootedness and narrow patriotism, that is, for Iqbāl, the meaning of Muḥammad's *Hijrah* from Makkah to Madīnah: by cutting the relations with his beloved hometown the Prophet wanted to give an example to the generations to come. Already in the note-book of 1910 that idea had been expressed:

Islam appeared as a protest against idolatry. And what is patriotism but a subtle form of idolatry. . . The fact that the Prophet prospered and died in a place not his birthplace is perhaps a mystic hint to the same effect.<sup>45</sup>

The tension between nationalism in the modern sense of the word — as he had witnessed it in Europe and saw growing in the Near East after the First World War (without understanding, however, that this was, again, a protest against the Western ruling powers) — and the "higher nationalism" of the Faithful which unites human beings all over the world; this tension forms a favourite subject of both his letters and his poetry till the end of his life:

Native country (*watan*) is something different in the right doctrine of the Prophet,  
and Native country is something different in the words of politicians.<sup>46</sup>

Leaving the homeland for spreading one's ideas all over the world, that is the ideal of the Muslim: just as the scent of the rose becomes widely known after it has left the rose-bud, so the individual and the "spiritual nation" can work properly only after having given up the clinging to the piece of earth which they call

fatherland in the political sense. Iqbāl never got tired of preaching that Islam is opposed to blood-relationship which is considered earth-rootedness<sup>47</sup> and therefore incompatible with the lofty ideals of the Prophet. "The greatest miracle which the Prophet has performed is that he has produced a nation" (*Tenk.*, 133). The whole concept of the *Rumūz* centres round this nation-building work of the Prophet, and 15 years later Iqbāl expressed the same ideas that

the Prophet was able to perform the miracle of restoration by his word *qum* — Rise! —

in awakening the cry *Allāh-hū* in the heart of a nation.<sup>48</sup>

He believes that a people, by turning back to the simple and proper teachings of the Prophet, the centre of which is the message of God's unity and sovereignty, can begin a new life after centuries of slumber and decadence.

Iqbāl takes over here ideas which had been expressed by a Muslim philosopher whom he admired greatly; the ideas Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1405) had expressed in his *Muqaddimah*<sup>49</sup> about the *'asabiyyah* — the binding power in socio-political life which is strengthened by religion. The adherence to the same prophetic revelation will create, in a group of individuals, the strongest possible feelings of solidarity and inspire the group with unexpected activities.

Muhammad has, according to Iqbāl, not only given the example of how a supranational society should be built, but is, at the same time, the symbol for the unshakable unity of this nation:

We are like a rose with many petals but with one perfume —  
He (Muhammad) is the soul of this society, and he is one.<sup>50</sup>

and in the *Payām-i Mashriq* he has repeated

We all the nurslings of one springtime be.<sup>51</sup>

The Prophet is "the heart in the handful of dust which we are"<sup>52</sup> i.e., the life giving power which makes mankind a true living organism.

The Islamic nation thus conceived as a sanctuary in which the

Unity of God, the unity of the Prophet, and the essential unity of all human beings are maintained as the basis and centre of life, all the manifestations of nationalism which tried to break up this unity seemed to be for the poet nothing more than new idols, a new *Lāt* and *Manāt* — as he calls them: we may translate adequately that political nationalism is Ba'alism. The Islamic nation (*millah*) has other roots than that of dust and water, of race and blood, it is built on fundamentals which are concealed in man's heart — and the main fundamental is

Love of the Prophet which runs like blood in the veins of the community.<sup>53</sup>

Since Iqbāl saw under the shining surface of the Nationalist movements in the Near-East a return to pre-Islamic, or rather pre-monotheistic Ba'alism (only in a refined, but therefore more dangerous form), his attacks against Persian nationalism and Turkish westernisation are so bitter and aggressive, and therefore he loves the Afghan nation which is still untouched by these dangers. The *Jāwīd-nāmah* contains, in the Mercury-Sphere, long discussions about the nation-concept in prophetic meaning, and even Iqbāl's last statement and a related poem<sup>54</sup> is directed against the Deobandī and pro-Congressite the late Husayn Ahmad Madanī who had as he saw it confused the terms nation (*millah*) in the Islamic sense, and nation (*qawm*) in the nationalist sense:

Before his call to Prophethood, the nation of Muhammad (peace be upon him) was no doubt a nation and a free one, but as Muhammad's *ummah* began to be formed, the status of the people as a nation became a secondary one. Those who accepted Muhammad's leadership, became part and parcel of the Muslim or Muhammadan community irrespective of the fact whether they belonged to his own nation or other nations. Formerly they had been slaves of land and race: land and race did not become their slaves . . . It is a peculiar greatness of the Holy Prophet that the self-invented distinctions and superiority complexes of the nations of the world are destroyed and there comes into being a community which can be styled *ummatun*

*muslimatun laka* and to whose thoughts the Divine dictum *shuhadā'* 'alā al-nās (witness for the people) justly applies.<sup>55</sup>

The ideal *millah* which Iqbāl aimed at should be the realization of the universal *Tawhīd*, the confession of unity which the Prophet had preached, who had founded, by his own example the universality of freedom, equality and brotherhood.<sup>56</sup>

On Prophethood is in the world our foundation,  
From Prophethood has our religion its ritual,  
From Prophethood are hundred-thousands of us one,  
Part from part cannot be separated.  
From Prophethood we all got the same melody,  
The same breath, the same aim.<sup>57</sup>

Iqbāl's ideal of nationhood is a striking example of that which Nieuwenhuize has underlined in an interesting article in *Studia Islamica* when he writes:

To a Muslim the problem of nationhood cannot be envisaged but in terms of what scope can be practically and empirically allowed to the operative effect to the concept of nation within the coordinates of the permanently valid comprehensiveness of the *ummah*.<sup>58</sup>

The factor which should form the ideal Islamic nation is the burning love of the Prophet which would enable both the individual and the community to live according to the Divine Law,<sup>59</sup> and it was Iqbāl's idea that, just as Muḥammad was the leader and completer of the long line of the Messengers of God, so his nation should also be the leader of nations and the most perfect model of a community:

He is the Seal of Prophets, we that of nations,

and as he was *Rahmatan* (Mercy for the Worlds), so are the Muslims who are related to him "the sign of Mercy for the people of the Worlds".<sup>60</sup> Iqbāl went even further in his analogy: the fact that this world is the heritage of the Free, is understood from the Divine

word *lawlāka* — "if thou hadst not been"<sup>61</sup> which was revealed to the Prophet and is, according to Iqbāl to be applied to every Faithful, and, as a logical consequence, to the ideal Muslim nation.<sup>62</sup>

That the aspiration to this leadership among nations involves also strength and the will to expand, is implicitly understood,<sup>63</sup> and might even lead to a new interpretation of the concept of *Jihād*, the Holy War. But as much as Iqbāl dreamt of the ideal Islamic nation, he clearly saw in the twenties the danger that Imperialistic trends might spoil those ideas,<sup>64</sup> and has warned the Islamic peoples of the consequences of blending the "poverty" of the Prophet and the splendour of mundane reign. He first dreamt, as did so many of his contemporaries, of the alleged ideal rule of the four Caliphs after Muḥammad's death, the Golden Age of Islam.

Yet, in our context, it is not the political importance of Iqbāl's ideas on religion and nationalism but simply their relation to his concept of Prophethood and the way how these ideas unfolded logically from his love for the Prophet who combined worldly and religious talents, and was conceived as a model of all qualities which are necessary for the happy life of the individual and nation.

The above-mentioned aspects of the prophetic life and prophethood are more or less common to all Muslim thinkers, and neither in the mystical interpretation nor in depicting Muḥammad as the model for every Muslim, in preaching the *imitatio Muhammadi* for individuals and nations Iqbāl has uttered new or unexpected ideas. But he has contributed one very interesting point of view to the problem of Prophethood. Islam has always held the doctrine that Muḥammad is the last Prophet after whom no other Prophet will come, his message is enough for the world now and till eternity. Iqbāl writes, commenting on the Qur'anic dictum, "Today we have completed your religion for you" (*Sūrah* 5:5):<sup>65</sup>

Now God has finalized for us the Divine law,  
and has finalized for our Prophet prophethood.  
Now the service of the cupbearer has been transferred to us,  
He gave us the last cup he possessed . . .

That means that the Islamic nation has to carry on on the lines

indicated by Muhammad. But what is the meaning of the Finality of Prophethood? Would not a new prophet who translates the Divine Will into the language of our time or the time to come, be necessary? Iqbāl answers this question in a highly interesting way:

... The Prophet of Islam seems to stand between the ancient and the modern world. In so far as the source of his revelation is concerned, he belongs to the ancient world; in so far as the spirit of his revelation is concerned, he belongs to the modern world. In him life discovers other sources of knowledge suitable to its new direction. The birth of Islam ... is the birth of inductive intellect. In Islam prophecy reaches its perfection in discovering the need of its own abolition ... <sup>66</sup>

That means, for Iqbāl, that the Qur'an has opened for man the vast field of scientific methods, realizing the importance of the careful observation of nature and history. For Iqbāl, Muḥammad was the first critical observer of psychic phenomena, as is proved by the example of his interest in a psychic Jewish youth whom the traditions describe.<sup>67</sup> The Prophet was thirsty for knowledge, and this thirst made him the first to encourage studies.

Though he saw the essence of Being without veil,  
Yet the word 'God increase me' (in knowledge) came from his lips —

this verse was written in order to kindle the interest of the ex-Afghan ruler Amānullāh Khān in studies and scientific work in his country.<sup>68</sup> We can understand the importance of this statement better when we confront it with the traditional attitude of the *mullās* in Islamic countries who were hostile to every kind of secular learning and saw in science only Satanic inventions. And on the other hand, Iqbāl wanted to prove — as Syed Ameer Ali and others had already done before him — that the European science which now threatens the Eastern countries and succeeds in seducing the ignorant masses, is based essentially on the scholarship of the Islamic peoples who introduced the scientific ways of thinking into Medieval Europe. Later on, 'Ināyatullāh Khān Mashriqī has in his commentary on the Qur'an even gone so far as to declare the modern research workers

as successors and substitutes of the Prophet! This is the one side — the cultural one — of the Finality of Prophethood. On the other hand, it means, in Iqbāl's words:

No spiritual surrender to any human being after Muḥammad who emancipated his followers by giving them a law which is realizable as arising from the very core of human conscience. Theologically the doctrine is that the socio-political organization called Islam is perfect and eternal. No revelation, the denial of which entails heresy, is possible after Muḥammad.<sup>69</sup>

These words were written against the modernist movement of the Qādiyānīs, which had emerged in the Punjab and whose role grew more and more important in the twenties. Mirzā Ghulām Aḥmad had declared himself the promised Messiah and claimed to be the Mahdī in 1908; and since then, the tension grew between the orthodox Muslims and the Qādiyānīs who split up in 1914 into the Lahore-group and the Qādiyān-group. As to the moderate Aḥmadiyahs of Lahore, Iqbāl acknowledges their activity for spreading Islam through their missionary organizations in different countries,<sup>70</sup> yet he considered them even more dangerous than the other group because they claimed their founder as a *Mujaddid*; and such a claim most Muslims were prepared to accept — yet, the heterodox teachings remained the same. The Qādiyānīs and their refutation form an important subject in his correspondence with the late Professor Ilyās Baranī who had published a book against them,<sup>71</sup> and with Sayyid Sulaymān Nadwī. He never ceases reiterating that the belief in the Finality of Muḥammad's Prophethood,

is really the factor which accurately draws the line of demarcation between Muslims and non-Muslims and enables one to decide whether a certain individual or group is part of the community or not . . . According to our belief Islam as a religion was revealed by God, but the existence of Islam as a society or nation depends entirely on the personality of the Holy Prophet.<sup>72</sup>

Further,

Any religious society historically arising from the bosom of Islam which claims a new prophethood for its basis . . . must be regarded by every Muslim as a serious danger to the solidarity of Islam. This must necessarily be so; since the integrity of Muslim society is secured by the idea of the Finality of Prophethood alone.<sup>73</sup>

Iqbāl's *Open Letter to Pandit Nehru* about the question of the Qādiyānīs is an important document,<sup>74</sup> and contains many an important statement about the juridical status of the Qādiyānīs whom he regarded as violating the fundamental doctrine of Islam, as more dangerous to Indian Islam than was Spinoze to the Jewish community in Amsterdam.<sup>75</sup> In his correspondence with Sulaymān Nadwī, Iqbāl put his finger on the question whether "in Islamic law the defamation of the Prophet is an offence which has to be punished, and if yes, what is the punishment?"<sup>76</sup> His correspondent answered in the affirmative and stated that even the death-penalty could be imposed. Iqbāl wanted at that time — in the beginning of the thirties — that the rulers of India should declare the Qādiyānīs a separate community. "This will be perfectly consistent with the policy of the Qādiyānīs themselves and the Indian Muslim will tolerate them just as he tolerates the other religions."<sup>77</sup> The problem, however, remained unsolved, and when Iqbāl wrote in 1936, that

thank Heaven the *fitnah* (disturbance, mischief) of the Qādiyānīs is growing weaker in the Punjab,<sup>78</sup>

he could not possibly foresee that the same problem was, in 1953, to form one of the most serious problems in the politico-religious history of the young state of Pakistan in which the orthodox claim to declaring the Qādiyānīs a non-Muslim minority led to heavy disturbances in the Punjab.

Iqbāl's aversion against this group who denied the Finality of Prophethood was so strong that he has even in his poem '*Session of the Satan*' which was written in that very year 1936 but published posthumously, inserted some allusions to the Qādiyānīs who despise the Holy War (*Jihād*) and juggle about the question of the Messiah, in order to weaken the unity of Islam, and helping, in that way, the



diabolic powers of destruction.<sup>79</sup> For him there was the unshakable confidence that:

For us Mustafā is enough.<sup>80</sup>

From this central place which the "Arabian Friend" held in his system of thought and personal faith, many symbols and ideas of Iqbal's work can be interpreted; for instance the central concept of love which often contains the idea of love of the Prophet, or love inspired by the Prophet.

The Arab countries, the language of the Beloved, and many allusions to Najd and the Hijāz gain their true significance in the light of his Muḥammad-veneration, and it can easily be understood that he wished his words to be translated into Arabic. But after all the praises of the Prophet in ardent hymns, or verses full of theological depth or social and political ideas, Iqbal turns, in one of his last verses<sup>81</sup> once more to the Prophet as a dear and compassionate friend;<sup>82</sup> and with a simplicity which is rarely met with in his poetry he shows himself on the road to Madīnah, to the threshold of the Beloved, in complete stillness and calmness:

just like a bird who, in the desert night  
Spreads out his wings, when thinking of his nest.

## NOTES

### Abbreviations:

- BJ - *Bāl-i Jibrīl.*
- BD - *Bāng-i Darā.*
- PM - *Payām-i Mashriq.*
- ZA - *Zabūr-i 'Ajam.*
- AK - *Asrār-i Khudī.*
- R - *Rumūz-i Bīkhudī.*
- Pas. - *Pas chih bāyad kard ay aqwām-i Sharq.*
- ZK - *Zarb-i Kalīm.*
- AH - *Armaghān-i Hijāz.*
- L - *Six Lectures on the Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam.*
- SS - *Speeches and Statements of Iqbal*, ed. Shamlou.
- SR - *Stray Reflections*, ed. Jāvid Iqbal.

1. A. Jeffery. Ibn al-'Arabī's "*Shajarat al-Kawn*", *Studia Islamica*, vol. X (1959), p.44.
2. Constance E. Padwick, *Muslim Devotions* (London 1961), p.145.
3. R: 152.
4. BJ: 61.
5. M. II: 93.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Pas: 69.
8. line 383.
9. M, I: 414.
10. Pas.: 64 ff.
11. M, I: 248.
12. Pas. 49; cf. BJ: 130.
13. cf. AH: 32.
14. PM: 221.
15. cf. AH: 71.
16. M, I: 404 (1936).
17. The author wrote in another place: The personality of the Prophet became the medium of religious experience, although, phenomenologically speaking, the centre of Islam is the Koran as direct divine revelation, not the messenger who brought it. But the Muslims felt that the figure of the Prophet was necessary for the maintenance of the Muslim faith in its "legal" aspect (as indicated in the second phrase of the profession of faith). The Prophet, as Rūmī says (*Mathnawī* 3:801), is a divine test for man; in contrast to Iblisian *tawhid*, which will bow only before God, the Prophet is put in between to destroy this temptation, which may lead, ultimately, toward pantheism and confusion of all religious creeds. Muhammad constitutes a limit in the definition of Islam and sets it off from other forms of faith. Mystics who used the first half of the profession of faith exclusively, without acknowledging the special rank of Muhammad, were prone to fall into a sweeping pantheistic interpretation of Islam (Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimension of Islam*, p.214).
18. Mis., 29: ff.
19. cf. M, II: 36 (1911).
20. R: 198.
21. Cf. his letters to Sayyid Chulām Mirān Shāh, M, I: 222 (1937); M, I: 232, (1938).

22. M, II: 397.
23. BJ: 151.
24. M, II: 341 (1937).
25. M, I: 382 (1937).
26. Cf. Mis: 3; Pas., 23: ff.
27. Pas.: 27.
28. AH: 89.
29. Pas.: 29.
30. BJ: 151.
31. Cf. A. Fischer, *Vergöttlichung und Tabuisierung der Namen Muhammads bei den Muslimen*, (Beiträge zur Arabistik, Semitistik und Islamwissenschaft, Leipzig 1944).
32. Pas.: 12 ff.
33. R: 130, cf. 121.
34. H. Ritter, *Das Meer der Seele* (Leiden 1955), esp. pp. 105, 208.
35. Cf. Pas.: 33.
36. Yusuf Hussain Khan, *Glimpses of Medieval Indian Culture* (London 1959), p.12.
37. AK: 483 ff.
38. M, I: 117.
39. Pas.: 53.
40. AK: 189.
41. M, I: 153 (1922).
42. Pas.: 33.
43. L: 190.
44. I. Goldziher, *Muhammadanische Studien* (Halle 1898), vol. I, p.12.
45. SR: 19.
46. BD: 174.
47. L: 146.
48. Pas.: 66.
49. Ibn Khaldūn: cf. his *Muqaddimah*, Book I, part 3 about the principle of 'asabiyyah.
50. AK: 305 ff., cf. R: 152.
51. LT: 83, cf. 82.

52. Mis.: 32.
53. R: 190.
54. Cf. AH: 278.
55. SS: 235, cf. 238.
56. R: 101 ff.
57. *Ibid.*, 116 ff.
58. C.A.O. van Nieuwenhuijze, "The Ummah, An Analytic Approach", *Studia Islamica*, vol. X (1959).
59. Cf. PM: 8.
60. R: 116.
61. BJ: 97.
62. Cf. also BJ: 117, 119.
63. Cf. M, II: 163.
64. Cf. BD: 286, AH: 110, 126.
65. Cf. R: 163.
66. L: 126.
67. L: 16.
68. PM: 6.
69. SS: 120.
70. Cf. M, II: 232 (1932).
71. M, I: 410, 419 in 1936 and 1937.
72. SS: 108.
73. SS: 94.
74. SS: 111-44.
75. *Ibid.*, 114.
76. M, I: 189 ff. (1935).
77. SS: 100.
78. M, I: 199.
79. BJ: 227.
80. AH: 81.
81. AH: 29.
82. Allusions to the *Arabian Friend* are found, for instance, in PM:194; ZK:61; AH:48; R:149, 195; cf. also A'zamī, *Falsafah Iqbal* (Cairo 1950), p.8.

# 14

## *FITRAH* AND SUNNAH

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ABD AL-QADIR AL-SUFI AL-MURABIT

*Fitrah* is what you are born on. In other words, it's your naturalness. It's natural man. *Fitrah* is the noble savage. *Fitrah* is a completely natural pattern of human existence which does not have introduced into it any — let us say, deep fantasy. They have no deep fantasy in the modern sense because what they have to support them, to sustain them, is a direct seeing into two things. One is the unity of the creation. The other is the unity of their cosmic situation, their metacosmic situation and their global situation, that is, they see the unity of their place in the world. They know where the dead go, they know they're on a journey, they know what these trees are, what these plants are, what that river is and what that mountain is. They know a basic picture. But within that basic picture the real matter of *fitrah* takes place and that is that they know a pattern, they know what the anthropologists call a canon, a canon of knowledge. They have built into them a canon of knowledge. Now this means that, first of all, they know how to be as human beings.

Now to start with, the Prophet said that *fitrah* meant clipping the moustache of men, not letting it grow down into the mouth so that it became dirty and food got into it and it was unclean. This

implied that, psychologically, if unclipped it was a sign of a certain imbalance in the *nafs* of man. Growing the beard, not styling the beard, not letting the face come through but letting the beard cover the face. The beard is the veil of men. Men are veiled in Islam as well as women. It is not just the Sufis but the *mutakallimūn*, the people of words in Islam, who consider that the Islam of a country becomes corrupted when the men begin to trim the beard away in order to show themselves. It becomes corrupted in vanity and it becomes corrupted in arrogance when they begin to overclip the moustache left at all, which is a sign of arrogance and cruelty. These are the inner aspects of the matter. The Prophet indicated that this was not the wisdom of the complete man, this was simply the basic thing of being a human being. Until you have this, by the science of this teaching that has come from the very beginning of man, man is incomplete, he is out of harmony, he is out of tune. Then after that he should in *fitrah* — shave his body hair, his sex and under the arms. Again, if you go to all those countries where the *fitrah* is still in balance, you will still find this quite naturally taking place. There is a fourth thing, which is the clipping of the nails, again to do with hygiene, to do with a certain basic sanity of balance, or working and eating with the fingers. These are the basics of natural man. This is the grooming like the cat which, in a healthy environment, keeps itself clean. If it's introduced into an unhealthy environment it ceases the whole process of grooming and cleaning which comes cyclically at certain points in the day; that whole process which is so beautiful to watch. So this is *fitrah*.

### Sunnah

Now we introduce another term which is Sunnah. Sunnah is derived from a word which means form. The form is the form of the human being. The Sunnah is negotiated. In other words, in his natural state, man's *fitrah* is inherited. Just as the bird knows how to fluff out its feathers, natural man knows how to keep himself in a certain physical state. It is a sign of the very profoundly deep-rooted psychosis of the epoch we live in that rather than the very things that

are *fitrah*, it is their opposites in many cases that are lauded as a kind of 'how it should be.' There is no escaping it, and you find it, of course, mostly in the decadence of very advanced industrial societies. Sunnah means — and this is why this apparently technical and anthropological business is vital to you — how you walk, how you sit, how you stand, how you greet people, how you are with old people, how you are with young people, how you are with young women, how you are with old women, how you are with strangers, how you are with guests, how you are with your enemies, what you may do, what you may not do. All this is the stuff of existence. If you take away Sunnah from man, you shatter the form of man. You cannot remove Sunnah without leaving in its place basic insanity, because insanity is broken form. The basic insanity, the psychosis, the neurosis, and let us not make too big a differentiation between these two terms, the imbalance, let us say; the deep imaginative mental and experiential imbalance of ordinary people. I'm not talking about the so-called mad-beyond recall. They are another story. They are further over in the spectrum. I am talking about the imbalance in the human situation that has led to the chaos, to the anarchy, and to the nightmare that is the society in which we find ourselves. No one with any feeling can but see what a horrific situation we have got ourselves into.

This Sunnah is not inherited characteristic, it is not known to man. Where did it come from? The teaching which is from the same source as the Sunnah declares itself unequivocally as saying that it comes from the source of life. In other words, that Allah negotiates life to His people through the *nabiyyin*, through the ones who are sent, through the *rasūlūn*, through the messengers. Each messenger comes to each epoch to give pattern for that time, and this patterning and redefining of the pattern has been going on from the beginning of man's time. The picture in the teaching of Islam is that every age — not only every nation and every people — but every age, every cycle of time, has its Prophet. In other words, as the human situation developed, expanded, changed, evolved, moved, there was need for this Sunnah to refine itself, to adjust itself. It was a wisdom. It was not a fixed thing. It's not, "don't do this, don't do that." It's

scientific law — if you boil water you get steam, if you do this then this will happen, if you behave in this way that will happen.

This Sunnah adjusts itself. In other words, the limits of the human being narrowed and widened and narrowed and widened in different spheres depending on the basic situation of the community of the time. So that when we come to now, when we come to this last period, to this last 1400 years, we come to the final phase of this picture according to the teaching of the wisdom-process. And it is with the coming of Muhammad that one has a final condification, one has the final picture of the Sunnah. When he came it was made very clear in the Qur'an. You must understand that the Qur'an is not the book which says, "stand like this and sit like this." He was the Book. There came the Book and the Sunnah. There came a silhouette of a man, a picture, a three-dimensional intime walking explanation. The same silhouette as the prophets before him — as Jesus, as Moses, as this one, as that one. Not only in the Semitic line which we know and in which we have been brought up, but other lines of prophets about which we've heard and others again about which we have never heard. According to this picture in the secret arithmetic of these matters, there have been since the beginning of time 124,000 prophets, *nabiyin*, ones who came with this picture.

The Prophet came with a message, he only came to deliver the message and not to force anything on people. If you get this right you get everything right. Islam is not a religion. Religion is the decadence, the collapse that sets in when the prophet's wisdom-teaching this is corrupted and is adapted because man can't be bothered. Basically we want to go backwards. We don't want to go forwards. We want to go back into the childhood state because it's much more comfortable and much easier. We don't want this terrible endless forward movement of energy, this arc of energy that goes against the biological process of running down and dying. So again and again, man has corrupted the message of the prophets and turned it into a religion. And when he corrupts it, it is in one of two ways. This can be seen in our immediate past in two pictures where the prophetic picture was corrupted. One was among the Jews and the other was among the Christians. The Christian mistake and the



Jewish mistake.

### The Jewish mistake

The Jews had a Sunnah which was much more intricate, much more complex — what you could eat, what you could not eat, what you could do on the day that was set aside for Allah, what you could not do on the day set aside for Allah, and so on and on. It was very complex and beautiful. It's ravishing and there is an aspect of man's mind that becomes hypnotised by it and he forgets the point of it until you find him saying, "Oh, you shouldn't do that, ah, but it's not allowed to do such and such, it's *ḥarām* to do this, ah! it's *ḥalāl* to do that." He goes around like a kind of policeman policing other people as to how they should be. And very soon you got what we might call the Jewish mistake — turning a scientific law which is there for our understanding into a legal law, jurisprudence, books. "You are guilty according to Book VII Page 17 .... five lashes, etc." The whole fantasy of legality and of controlling others. And it was the perfect system — the organic life process of the Sunnah *turned upside down* was the perfect system to tyrannize others and make their lives absolute misery.

### The Christian mistake

The presence of Sayyidinā 'Īsā — (Jesus) — '*alayhissalām*, the impact of it, was so incredible, so extraordinary, the spiritual beauty of Sayyidinā 'Īsā — '*alayhissalām*, the overwhelming states that Allah granted him, the miracles that He granted him, the knowledges that He granted him, were so awesome to the Christians that they longed in some way to be lost in it all. But the thing that kept the sanity of the reality of 'Īsā was the Sunnah which was the Sunnah of the prophets before him, because he came affirming the Sunnah of the earlier prophets. When the non-Jewish Christians became involved they didn't want to adopt the whole thing, this whole science. They didn't want it, they couldn't be bothered with it. So what they said was, "You don't have to bother with it. You can eat

what you like, you can sit where you like, you can dress as you like. It's enough that you believe in him and everything is all right." So they rejected the Sunnah of the Jews and projected a mystery transaction, ritualisation, iconography, initiate priesthood — all to enshrine this mystery-transaction blood-into-wine, and so on. This was what they claimed would REPLACE the Sunnah, which was a science of gaining spiritual knowledge — a superstition that assured you Paradise.

### The science of sane living

That is the picture of the point we come to with Sayyidinā Muhammad, *sallallāhu 'alayhi wasallam*. When he came he said, "I am 'abd and I am rasul." I am a slave — in other words I am one of you. We are all 'abd-Allāh. We are slaves of Allah, we are born and we will die. But he also said, "I am *rasūl*. I come with a message. And the message was Qur'an, the message was himself. It says in the Qur'an to follow the Messenger, do what he does. What he says you do, you do, and what he says you don't do, you don't do. You can't have the one without the other. Now this is the outward picture. It is not this thing separate from life which we call religion. It is the science of sane living. It is the science of how to live.

When the Prophet entered the city of al-Yathrib he named it *Madīnah al-Munawwarah*. *Madīnah al-Munawwarah* means the 'illuminated city' and the illumination of Madīnah. The people of Madīnah were lights. Sayyidinā Muhammad said, "My companions are like stars. You can follow any one of them and you wilt be guided." They were luminous people. There have never been people like the people of Madīnah on the face of the earth from that moment till now and from that time to the beginning of time. At the time of Hudaybah, the Prophet said "At this moment you are the best people who have ever been on the earth." They were the fulfilment of the human picture. They were compassionate. They were noble. They were courageous. They were generous to the point of dying rather than let another go without a drink of water. Some were very rich,

some were very very poor, but nobody went without. They shared among each other. There are a million examples, all recorded, all known, all told and retold. The picture was so incredible that 1400 years later we know them almost to the streets on which they lived. Islam is vast. Islam is vast in itself as a wisdom process and it's vast humanity because it is the way that Allah has decreed. It doesn't take much intellect to recognize the people of the way, the people who move *fi sabilillāh*, who act *fi sabilillāh*, who don't do a thing for themselves but do it *lillāh* — for Allah! — everything *lillāh*. They eat *lillāh*. They give *lillāh*. They accept *lillāh*. This is the human being.

We haven't got to *ma'rifah*, we haven't yet got on the subject of gnosis, we haven't got near it. We have first of all to know what a human being is. We've lost *fitrah*. We are losing contact in this age with what a human being is. The beards have been ripped off the faces of men. You must know, those of you who wear beards, the extraordinary hostility you can encounter by the fact of having a beard in certain company. This is not superficial. This is not class difference or prejudice. This is a deep rooted awareness that in front of them is someone who still has that basic harmony. The Prophet said, "There is a blessing for a man, even if he is not a muslim, there is a blessing for a man by his having a beard." By his wearing the beard he's already in harmony.

The thing about the Sunnah which lies on this *fitrah* is when you begin to find out about it, one of the discoveries you make right away is that you already have got some of the Sunnah in you, you're already doing it. If you remove something injurious from the road to stop someone from having an accident, that is Sunnah. If you come up to your brother with a smiling face when you don't feel like smiling, but you give him a smile, that's Sunnah. Existence is about this easing of the human situation. This is Sunnah. But more than this, we partake of the nature of Sayyidinā Muḥammad, his humanness. We will not receive a book because with him the role of messenger is completed but the *maqām*, the station — the spiritual station of *nabī*, of prophet, we participate in it. We have a little bit of it. He said that a true dream is 1/25th part of prophecy. In other

words man is there, he's already there. He's already got the thing that if he will let it open in himself, will let it develop and awaken in himself, will make him become vast. The human being can become tremendous if he gives himself the chance.

He said that good conduct — good action was 1/6th part of prophecy. Anyone anywhere who acts in that way is on the '*hudā*', he's on the ancient guidance, he's *hanīf*, he's on the way of the *rajulullāh*. So you see, some of the really important things of being Muslim, of Islam, are performed by people who have not even heard of the Prophet. The things that are 'the Steep', that are the hard climb of spiritual development, are listed in the Qur'an and every one of them, any human being can do. Looking after the orphan, feeding the hungry, protecting the widowed women, helping people, just sheer humanness is the stuff of Islam. You're half Muslim before the matter begins.

But the bit that matters, the bit that underpins it, the bit that holds it up, the bit on which it's all sustained is your relationship to the Ineffable, to the Absolute, to the Reality that has created you. The thing that makes you a real human being is whether your higher self is in tune with the Divine Reality. If you say '*Allāhu Akbar*' as He asked you to say '*Allāhu Akbar*' you have aligned yourself, you have attuned yourself, you have harmonized yourself.

Do you see that the world is turning around the stars and Ka'bah is there (at the centre) and there's a circle there 24 hours a day. There's a circle around it, circling it which has been circling it twenty-four hours a day from now back to the time of Sayyidinā Ibrāhīm. Endlessly circling round and round. If you were a Martian watching, you'd say, "It's total chaos down there but there's one pattern that never stops. And that is a circle that goes round and round one dot somewhere over there." And if you kept on watching you'd say, "And once a year there is a whole movement in towards that point and this circling becomes vast, becomes tremendous." Then you'd watch another movement and you'd say, "Well, not only that but we find that around this point there are concentric rings getting bigger and bigger, spreading right around the globe, all turned into this point and it's like a flickering, rippling wave." It's

to do with the time of the day when you pray. Here, now. A half an hour later they are praying, over there.

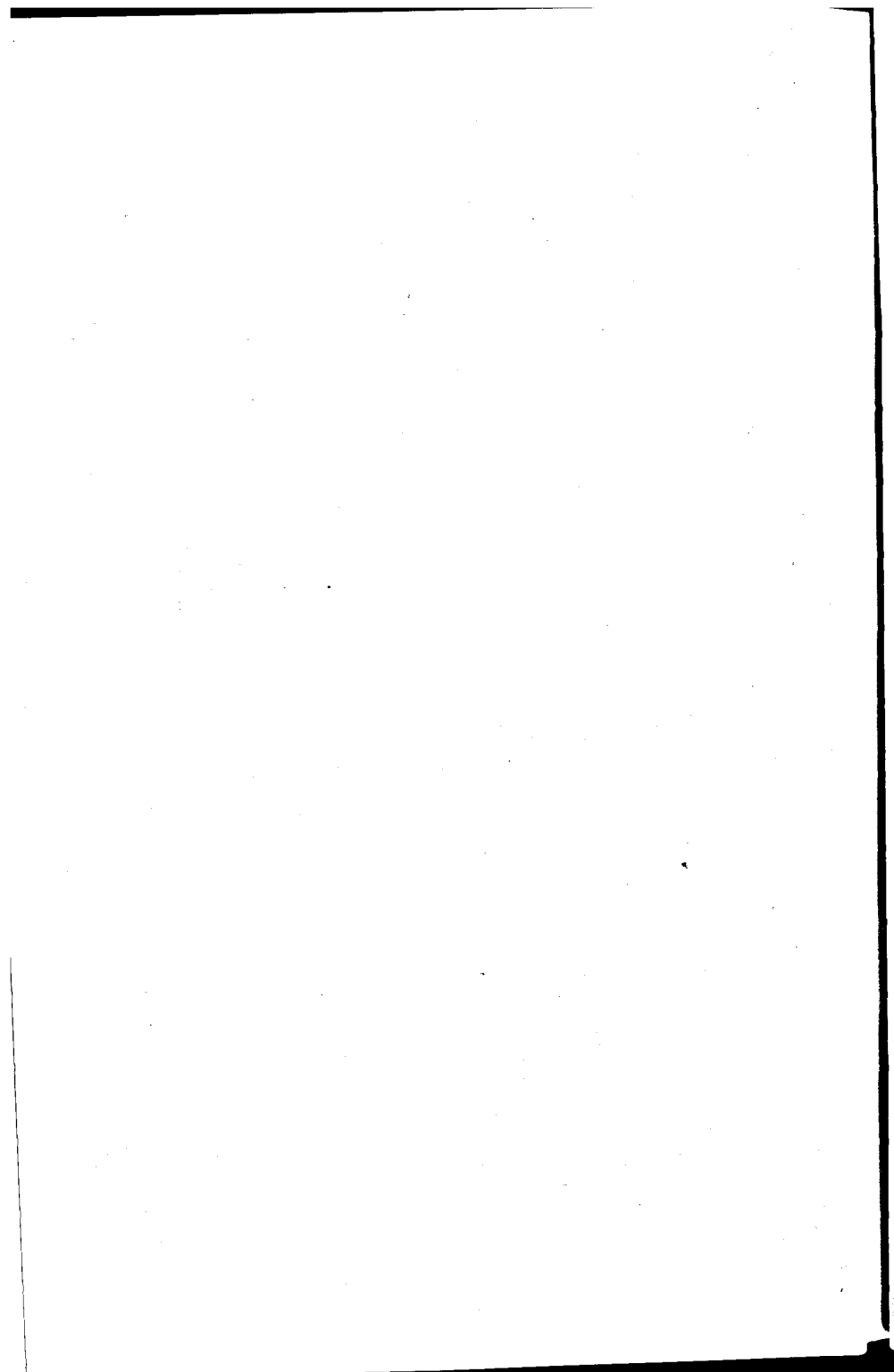
There's an endless, non-stop wave of human beings who turn away from all this insanity, who turn away from all this madness, and turn to the divine Reality that is in the centre of their beings and they say, "All that ever happens in the world is that every dawn the angels come out from the throne of Allah and say "Glory to Allah, He is Majestic, He is Beautiful, He is Sublime, He is the Creator, He is the Doer, He is the Knower, He is the Willer, He is the Seer, He is the Hearer, He is the Actor, Glory be to Allah." That's all that ever happens. And everything else is '*wahm*'. And here we are caught in the *wahm*, in the illusion.

The Prophet said, "Truly man is asleep and when he dies he wakes up." He also said, "Die before you die." Wake up! Islam is the science of waking up. It's already happening. By your bowing and your prostrating, by your calling upon Allah, by your eating at the same plate with three fingers, by the growing of your beard, by the attuning yourself to your brothers, by the courtesy among you, it is happening already. It is an alchemical process. The way of Islam is alchemy. The science of Islam is alchemy — real alchemy. We must know above everything, above all our own enmity towards ourselves, above all our own betrayal and our own weakness and our own vacillation and our own stupidity and our being tired of existence, we must know who we are, why we are here, where we are going, what is the journey. We must know — we want to know, "Who am I?" You must find the meaning of your own reality. "He who knows his self, truly he knows his Lord" — his Sustainer, his Creator. You must find out.

Allah said, "The whole universe cannot contain me but the heart of the *mu'min* contains me." Everything is linked to everything in this world. It is one creation. It is one globe. And that globe is part of one galaxy and that galaxy is part of the metagalaxy of the vast creation, the end of which we haven't begun to get to and it is one and that one is nothing. The Existent is Allah. The only reality is Allah. The only truth is Allah. And the truth has come and falsehood vanishes away.

# APPENDICES

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## APPENDIX I

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### EXTRACTS FROM AL-SHĀFI'Ī'S *RISĀLAH*

(Translated by Majid Khadduri)

#### ON THE OBLIGATION OF MAN TO ACCEPT THE AUTHORITY OF THE PROPHET

*A Declaration Concerning the Duty Imposed by God, as  
Laid Down in His Book [Ordering Men] to Follow the  
Prophet's Sunnah*

86. Al-Shāfi'ī said: God has placed His Apostle — [in relation to] His religion, His commands and His Book — in the position made clear by Him as a distinguishing standard of His religion by imposing the duty of obedience to Him as well as prohibiting disobedience to Him. He has made His merits evident by associating belief in His Apostle with the belief in Him. For God, Blessed and Most High, said:

*So believe in God and His Apostles, and do not say: "Three." Refrain; [it will be] better for you. God is only one God. Glory be to Him. His having a son is something alien to him [Qur'an, 4:169].*

And He said:



*The believers are only those who have believed in God and His Apostle, and who when they are with him on some common affair do not go away until they ask his permission [24:62].*

Thus [God] prescribed that the perfect beginning of the faith, to which all other things are subordinate, shall be the belief in Him and then in His Apostle. For if a person believes only in Him, not in His Apostle, the name of the perfect faith [i.e., Islam] will never apply to him until he believes in His Apostle together with Him.<sup>1</sup>

So the Apostle laid down the Sunnah [of reciting the Prophet's name together with that of God] for testing the faith of every man [as the following tradition indicates]:

Mālik b. Anas told us from Hilāl b. Usāmah from 'Atā' b. Yasār from 'Umar b. al-Hakam, who said:

I went to the Apostle of God with a slave-girl and I asked him: "I have taken an oath [to free a slave]; may I free her?" "Where is God?" the Apostle asked her. "In heaven," she answered. "And who am I?" asked he. "You are the Apostle of God," she answered. "You may free her," [the Prophet] said.<sup>2</sup>

[The transmitter's name, 'Umar b. al-Hakam] — al-Shāfi'ī says — should read Mu'āwiyah b. al-Hakam, for Mālik, I believe, has not correctly reported the name, as others did.

87. Shāfi'ī said: God has imposed the duty on men to obey His divine communications as well as the Sunnah of His Apostle. For He said in His Book:

*O our Lord, raise up amongst them an Apostle, one of themselves, to recite to them Thy signs and to teach them the Book and Wisdom and to purify them. Verily Thou art All-mighty, All-wise [2:123].*

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1. Cf. Tabarī, *Tafsīr*, Vol. IX, pp.422-23; Bayḍāwī, pp.137-38, 474-75.

2. Mālik, Vol.II, pp.776-77.

And He, glorious be His praise, said:

*And also we have sent among you an Apostle, one of yourselves, to recite to you our signs, and purify you, to teach you the Book and the Wisdom, and to teach you what you did not know [2:146].*

And He said:

*God bestowed a favour upon the believers when He raised up amongst them an Apostle, one of themselves, to recite His signs to them, to purify them and to teach them the Book, although they had formerly been in manifest error [3:158].*

And He, glorious be His praise, said:

*It is He who has raised up an Apostle among the untutored people, one of their number to recite to them His signs, to purify them, and to teach them the Book and the Wisdom, though formerly they had been in manifest error [62:2].*

And He said:

*But remember the goodness which God has shown you and how much of the Book and the Wisdom He has sent down to you to admonish you thereby [2:231].*

And He said:

*God has sent down to thee the Book and the Wisdom, and has taught thee what thou did not know before; the bounty of God towards thee is ever great [4:113].*

And He said:

*And call to mind the signs of God and the Wisdom which are*

*recited in your houses; verily God is gentle, well-informed*  
[33:34].

So God mentioned His Book — which is the Qur'an — and Wisdom, and I have heard that those who are learned in the Qur'an — whom I approve — hold that Wisdom is the Sunnah of the Apostle of God. This is like what [God Himself] said; but God knows best. For the Qur'an is mentioned [first], followed by Wisdom; [then] God mentioned His favour to mankind by teaching them the Qur'an and Wisdom. So it is not permissible for Wisdom to be called here [anything] save the Sunnah of the Apostle of God. For [Wisdom] is closely linked to the Book of God, and God has imposed the duty of obedience to His Apostle, and imposed on men the obligation to obey his orders.<sup>3</sup> So it is not permissible to regard anything as a duty save that set forth in the Qur'an and the Sunnah of His Apostle. For [God], as we have [just] stated, prescribed that the belief in His Apostle shall be associated with the belief in Him.

The Sunnah of the Apostle makes evident what God meant [in the text of His Book], indicating His general and particular

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3. Al-Shāfi'ī said: [Al-Bayān] includes all that the Apostle has provided in the Sunnah concerning which there is no [legislation in the] Book. There is in this book — concerning God's favouring mankind [with the ability] to understand the Book and Wisdom — a proof that Wisdom is the Sunnah of the Apostle of God.

Included in what I have stated concerning God's command to His creatures ordering obedience to the Apostle and specifying the place it has in religion, is a proof of the precise definition of the duties stated in the Qur'an, which consists of the following categories:

The first category is what the Book has laid down with such clarity that nothing further — in addition to revelation (*tanzīl*) — was needed.

The second category consists in what is clearly stated in the obligation imposed [by God] ordering obedience to the Prophet. The Apostle in his turn precisely stated on the authority of God what the duties are, upon whom they are binding, and in what circumstances some of them are required or not required, and when they are binding.

The third category consists in what [God] has specified only in the Sunnah of the His Prophet, in the absence of textual [legislation in the] Book.

[Al-Shāfi'ī's *Risala* translated by Majid Khadduri, #22.]

[commands]. He associated the Wisdom [embodied] in the Sunnah with his Book, but made it subordinate [to the Book]. Never has God done this for any of His creatures save His Apostle.

***God's Command Ordering Obedience to the Apostle is Both Associated with Obedience to Him and Ordered Independently***

88. [Al-Shāfi'ī said]: God said:

*When God and His Apostle have decreed a matter, it is not for a believing man or a woman to exercise a choice in a matter affecting him; whoever opposes God and His Apostle has deviated into manifest error [33:36].*

And He said:

*O you who believe, obey God and obey the Apostle and those in authority among you. If you should quarrel about anything, refer it to God and the Apostle, if you believe in God and the Last Day. That is better and fairer in the issue [4:62].*

Some scholars have held that "those in authority" [means] the commanders of the Apostle's army. That is what more than one commentator has told us. But God knows best.<sup>4</sup>

This is in accord with what [God] said, for the Arabs who had been around Makkah knew nothing about command, and [the idea of] some submitting to the command of others was repugnant to them.

When, however, they submitted to [the authority of] the Apostle, they did not think that [such an authority] was fit to reside

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4. Tabarī adds that it may mean the leaders in matters of religion and law. See Tabarī, *Tafsīr*, Vol. VIII, pp.495-504; Baydāwī, p.115.

in any hands other than the Apostle's.

So they were commanded to obey "those in authority" — the ones whom the Apostle appointed, with conditional but not absolute obedience, concerning their rights and duties. However, [God] said: "If you should quarrel about anything, refer it to God," that is, in the event of disagreement.

89. Al-Shāfi'ī said: This [i.e., the meaning implied in the latter command] is, if God will, as He said about "those in authority", namely, that "If you should quarrel" (but God knows best), they [the people] and the commander whom they were ordered to obey — should "refer it to God and the Apostle" for a settlement on the basis of what God and His Apostle said, if they know it. If you do not know what God's commands are, you should ask the Apostle, if you are able to reach him,<sup>5</sup> or any one of you who is able to do so. For this is an obligation concerning which there should be no disagreement, in accordance with God's saying:

*When God and His Apostle have decreed a certain matter, it is not for a believing man or a woman to have a choice in a matter affecting him [33:36].*

As to the disputes that happened after the Apostle's [death], the matter was decided in accordance with God's judgment [as laid down in the Qur'an] and then that of His Apostle [as laid down in the Sunnah]. But if a text were not applicable, the matter was decided by analogy on the strength of a precedent sought [either in the Qur'an or the Sunnah] in the same manner as I have [already] explained concerning the *qiblah*, [witnesses of] just character, equal compensation, and whatever God has prescribed in parallel cases. For He said:

*Those who obey God and the Apostle are with the prophets and the veracious and the martyrs and the upright upon whom God*

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5. Tabarī, *Tafsīr*, Vol. VIII, pp.504-505.

*has bestowed favour. Good company are these [4:71].*

And He said:

*O you who have believed, obey God and His Apostle [8:20].*

***God's Command-Ordering Obedience to His Apostle***

90. [Al-Shāfi'ī said]: God, glorious be His praise, said:

*Verily, those who swear allegiance to thee swear allegiance really to God; the hand of God is above their hands. So whoever breaks his oath, breaks it only to his own hurt, and to him who fulfils what he has pledged to God, He will grant a great reward [48:10].*

And He said:

*Whoever obeys the Apostle has obeyed God [4:82].*

So God instructed [men] that their homage to the Apostle is homage to Him, and their obedience [to him] is obedience to Him.

And He said:

*But no! by thy Lord, they will not become believers until they make thee judge in their disputes and do not afterwards find difficulty in Thy decisions, but surrender in full submission [4:68]*

This verse, we have been told, was revealed in connection with a land dispute between al-Zubayr and another man in which the Prophet gave a decision in favour of al-Zubayr. This decision is a Sunnah laid down by the Apostle, not a command in the text of the

Qur'an.<sup>6</sup>

The Qur'an indicates what I have just stated; for if this decision were a Qur'anic decision, it should have been prescribed in the text of the Book of God.

But if men fail to accept a decision based on a clear text of the Book of God, they undoubtedly cease to be believers, for they are rejecting a decision based on divine legislation. For God, Blessed and Most High, said:

*Do not put the Apostle's calling on you for aid on the same footing amongst you as your calling on each other. God knows, those of you who slip away secretly, so let those who go against His command beware lest a trial befall them, or a painful punishment [24:63].*

And He said:

*When they are called to God and to His Apostle that he may judge between them, lo, a party of them avert themselves. But if they are in the right, they will come to him in submission.*

*Is there sickness in their hearts, or are they in doubt, or do they fear that God and His Apostle may act unjustly towards them. Nay, but they are the evil doers.*

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6. Yahya b. Ādam, in *Kitāb al-Kharāj*, reports the case as follows: "One of the Helpers from among the Banū Umayyah had a dispute with al-Zubayr concerning a creek (*sharj*) in the *harrah*, and the Prophet said: 'Irrigate, O Zubayr, and then leave the water alone.' Said the man of the Banū Umayyah: 'Justice, O Prophet, even though he is the son of your aunt!' And the face of the Prophet changed so that the man knew that what he had said had hurt the Prophet. Then the Prophet said: 'O Zubayr, shut off the water till it reaches the height of two ankles' — or he said: — '[till it] reaches the fence — and then let the water flow.' It was revealed [then] — or he said: recited: 'No, by thy Lord, they do not believe until they make thee judge in the tangles . . . ' (Qur'an, 4:68). [Yahyā b. Ādam, *Kitāb al-Kharāj*, ed. A.M. Shākir (Cairo 1347 A.H./1929), pp.106-107; English translation by A. Ben Shemesh, entitled *Taxation In Islam* (Leiden 1958), p.74. See also Tabarī, *Tafstr*, Vol. VIII, pp.519-23.

*All that the believers said when they were called to God and His Apostle that he might judge between them was: "We hear and obey." These are the ones who prosper.*

*Whoever obeys God and His Apostle, and fears God and shows piety — these are the ones who attain felicity [24:47-51].*

Through this communication, God instructed men that their recourse to the Apostle to judge among them is a recourse to God's judgment, for the Apostle is the judge among them, and when they accept his judgment they do so only because of an obligation imposed by God.

And He instructed them that the [Prophet's] judgment is His judgment, for his judgment is imposed by Him and by His established knowledge — rendering him a man of destiny and assisting him by preserving him from error and [worldly] success — and by testifying that He guides him and causes him to obey His order.

So God imposed the obligation upon His creatures to obey His Apostle, and He instructed them that [obedience] to him is obedience to Him.

The sum-total of what He instructed them is the duty to obey Him and His Apostle, and that obedience to the Apostle is obedience to Him. He [also] instructed them that He imposed the duty on His Apostle to obey His order, Glorious be His praise.

***The Obligation Made Clear by God to His Creatures That He Imposed upon His Apostle to Follow What He Revealed to Him, and What He Testified to of His Obeying His Commands, His Guidance, and That He is the Guide of Any Who Follow Him***

91. Al-Shāfi'ī said: God, Glorious be His praise, said to His Prophet:

*O Prophet, fear God, and obey not the unbelievers and the*



*hypocrites. Verily God is All-knowing, All-wise. But follow what is revealed to thee from thy Lord. Verily God is aware of the things you do [33:1-2].*

And He said:

*Follow what has been revealed unto thee from thy Lord — there is no god but Him — and turn thou away from the polytheists [6:106].*

And He said:

*Then we set thee upon an open way of the Law; therefore follow it, and follow not the whims of those who do not know [45:18].*

So God instructed His Apostle that He has favoured him with His established knowledge and that he will preserve him from mankind, for He said:

*O thou Apostle, proclaim what is sent down to thee from thy Lord — if thou do it not thou hast not delivered His message — and God will defend thee from the people [5:71].*

92. Al-Shāfi'ī said: And [He], glorious be His praise, certified [the Prophet's] firm belief in what He commanded him, and in Guidance to himself and to whoever follows him. For He said:

*Thus We have revealed to thee a spirit belonging to Our affair. Thou didst not know what either the Book or the Faith were. But We have made it a light by which We guide whoever We please of Our servants, and verily thou shalt guide unto a straight path [42:52].*

And He said:

*Had it not been for the bounty and mercy of God toward thee,*

*a party of them would have proposed to lead thee astray; but they lead only themselves astray; they do not hurt thee at all. God has sent down to thee the Book and the Wisdom, and He has taught thee what thou didst not know; God's bounty to thee is ever great* [4:113].

Thus God declared that He commanded His Prophet to obey His order, and certified what he proclaimed on His behalf as well as what he certified for himself.<sup>7</sup> We [also] certify for him in order to draw near to God by our belief in Him, and we make entreaties to Him by belief in His words. [For] 'Abd al-'Azīz [b. Muḥammad al-Darāwardī] told us from 'Amr b. Abī 'Amr — the freed slave of al-Muttalib — from al-Muttalib b. Ḥanṭab that the Apostle of God said:

I have left nothing concerning which God has given you an order without giving you that order; nor have I neglected anything concerning which He has given you a prohibition without giving you that prohibition.<sup>8</sup>

93. Al-Shāfi'ī said: What God has informed us of in His established knowledge and in His final and irrevocable judgment — a favour and a blessing from Him — is that He prevented those who attempted to lead [the Prophet] astray, and informed him that they could not hurt him at all.

In certifying that [the Prophet] guides mankind along a straight-

7. Tabarī, *Tafstr*, Vol. IX, pp.199-201; Baydāwī, pp.126-27.

8. This is the first part of a tradition, the second part of which al-Shāfi'ī cites in paragraph 97. In his *Kitāb al-Umm* (Vol VI, p.209, margin) the two parts are cited as one tradition. Transmitters have related the tradition in a variety of wordings, but all agree on the substance. See al-Suyūṭī, *al-Jāmi' al-Saghir* (Cairo 1352 A.H./1933), Vol. I, p.305. For a discussion on the transmission of this tradition and on al-Muttalib b. Ḥanṭab, Companion of the Prophet, see Shākir's edition of the *Risalah*, pp.93-102, note 8. This Companion should be distinguished from a Successor by the same name who transmitted traditions on the authority of 'Ā'ishah, Abū Hurayrah, and Anas b. Mālik [See Ibn Hajar, *al-Isābah* (Cairo 1358 A.H./1939), Vol. III, p.404]. See also J. Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence*, pp.53-54.

forward path — the path of God — and that he delivers His message and obeys His commands — as we have stated before — and in ordering obedience to him and in emphasizing all [of this] in the [divine] communications just cited — God has given evidence to mankind that they should accept the judgment of the Apostle and obey his orders.

94. Al-Shāfi'ī said: Whatever the Apostle has decreed that is not based on any [textual] command from God, he has done so by God's command. So God instructed us in His saying:

*And verily thou wilt guide [mankind] to a straight path, the path of God [42:52-53].*

For the Apostle has laid down a Sunnah [on matters] for which there is a text in the Book of God as well as for others concerning which there is no [specific] text. But whatever he laid down in the Sunnah God has ordered us to obey, and He regards [our] obedience to him as obedience to Him, and [our] refusal to obey him as disobedience to Him for which no man will be forgiven; nor is an excuse for failure to obey the Apostle's Sunnah possible owing to what I have already stated and to what the Apostle [himself] has said:

Sufyān [b. 'Uyaynah] told us from Sālim Abū al-Nadr — a freed slave of 'Umar b. 'Ubaydullāh — who heard 'Ubaydullāh b. Abī Rāfi' relate from his father that the Apostle had said:

Let me find no one of you reclining on his couch,<sup>9</sup> and when confronted with an order of permission or prohibition from me, say: "I do not know [whether this is obligatory or not]; we will follow only

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9. In both the Būlāq and Shākir editions there is a statement following this tradition to the effect that al-Shāfi'ī explained the word *arṭa* (a couch) to mean a 'bedstead' (*sarīr*); but this statement is perhaps spurious, as Shākir himself suspected, since it is written on the margin of the MS, possibly by one of the readers.

what we find in the Book of God."<sup>10</sup>

95. Al-Shāfi'ī said: The Sunnahs of the Apostle together with the [communications of the] Book of God fall in two categories: First, for-every textual [communication] in the Book the Apostle laid down [a similar Sunnah] in conformity with divine communication. Second, for any [ambiguous] command the Apostle laid down on God's behalf [a Sunnah] clarifying the meaning implied by God and specifying what [kind of] duty God imposed, whether general or particular, and how man should carry it out. In both categories [the Prophet] followed the Book of God.

96. [Al-Shāfi'ī] said: I know of no scholar who does not agree that the Sunnah of the Prophet falls in three categories, two of which were agreed upon unanimously. These two categories agree [on certain matters] and differ [on others].

First, for whatever acts there is textual [legislation] provided by God in the Book, the Apostle [merely] specified clearly what is in the text of the Book. Second, as to any [ambiguous] communication in the Book laid down by God, [the Prophet] specified the meaning implied by Him. These are the two categories on which scholars do not disagree.

The third category consists of what the Apostle has laid down in the Sunnah and concerning which there is no text in the Book.

97. Some [scholars] have said: God empowered [the Prophet], by virtue of the duty He imposed [on mankind] to obey Him and his success in obtaining [God's] approval in accordance with His

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10. Abū Dāwūd, Vol. IV, p.200. This tradition is followed by a statement, paragraph 296 (Shākir's edition), which reads: "Sufyān [b. 'Uyaynah] said: '[This Ḥadīth] was related to me by Muḥammad b. al-Munkadir, who transmitted it from the Prophet without citing the names of [other] authorities'." Such a tradition, lacking the names of other transmitters, is called *ḥadīth mursal*. Al-Shāfi'ī, however, seems to have depended on the authority of 'Ubaydullāh b. Rāfi', the son of Abū Rāfi', a freed slave of the Prophet, who transmitted the tradition from his father [See Ibn Hajar, *al-Isābah*, Vol. 1, p.488].

established knowledge, to provide Sunnahs [for matters] on which there is no text in the Book. Others said: No Sunnah was ever laid down [by the Prophet] unless there was a basis<sup>11</sup> for it in the Book, such as the Sunnah which specified the number of prayers [each day] and [the modes of] their performance, based on the general duty of prayer. In like manner, [the Prophet] laid down Sunnahs dealing with sale [of property], as well as others. For God said:

*Do not consume your property among you uselessly [4:33].*

And He said:

*God has permitted sale and forbidden usury [2:277].*

Whatever God has provided by [way of] permission or prohibition, he has specified on God's behalf as he did in [the case of the duty of] prayer.

Others said: [The Prophet] received a message from God confirming the Sunnah by a command from Him.

Still others said: [The Prophet] was inspired with all that he had laid down. The Sunnah is [divine] Wisdom inspired by God, and so whatever He inspired him with [constitutes] Sunnah. [For] 'Abd al-'Azīz [b. Muhammad al-Darāwardī] told us from 'Amr b. Abī 'Amr from al-Muttalib, who related that the Prophet said:

The trustworthy spirit [Gabriel] has inspired me [with the thought] that no soul will ever die until it will receive its full provision. Be, therefore, moderate in your request.<sup>12</sup>

98. Al-Shāfi'ī said:<sup>13</sup> Among the things with which [the Prophet] was inspired is his Sunnah. This [Sunnah] is the Wisdom which God mentioned [in His Book], and whatever He sent down to

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11. Literally, Foundation, i.e., a fundamental principle or a precedent.

12. See note 8.

13. Būlāq ed., p.16.

him is a Book — the Book of God — all of these have been given to him as favours from God and by His will. These favours are either embodied in one Favour [i.e. the Message] or take different forms. We pray God for protection from error and success.

In whatever form it may take, God made it clear that He imposed the duty of obedience to His Apostle, and has given none of mankind an excuse to reject any order he knows to be the order of the Apostle of God. God has rather made men have need for him in [all matters of] religion and He has given the proof for it by providing that the Sunnah of the Apostle make clear the meanings of the duties laid down in His Book, so that it might be known that the Sunnah — whether in the form specifying the meaning of God's commands as provided in the text of the Book which they can read or in the form of legislation in the absence of such a text — in either form represents God's command and is in [full] agreement with that of His Apostle; both are [equally] binding in all circumstances. This has been confirmed by the Apostle in the tradition of Abū Rāfi' which has already been cited.<sup>14</sup>

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14. See note 10.

## APPENDIX II

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### FUNDAMENTAL IDEAS OF AL-SHĀFI'Ī'S *RISĀLAH*

A brief summary of the content of the *Risālah* hardly does justice to it, for only a complete translation of the text<sup>1</sup> can present a full expression of the ideas and the method of reasoning of its author. However, a description of the *Risālah*, its fundamental ideas and problems, may serve the reader as a guide.

The *Risālah* opens with an introductory chapter on the religious basis of Islamic jurisprudence. After the usual homage and expressions of gratitude to God, al-Shāfi'ī points out that at the time Muhammad was charged with his prophetic mission, mankind was divided into two classes. There were those who did not believe in God and who worshipped idols and stones and other natural objects, and there were the 'People of the Book',<sup>2</sup> who believed in God and in the teachings of His earlier prophets, but who had changed God's commands and forged falsehood by their tongues, mixing it with the truth that God had revealed to them. Because of this state of misbelief, God decided to send forth the last of his prophets, Muhammad, to repair and reconstruct the world into a God-fearing

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1. For a complete translation, please see *al-Shafii's Risala*, translated by Majid Khadduri, (Islamic Texts Society, Cambridge, 1987).
  2. *Ahl al-kitāb*, the people who possess a scripture, include Christians, Jews, Magians (Zoroastrians), Samaritans, and Sabians.

community. Thus Muḥammad's mission, embodied in the term 'Islam', was to provide mankind with the final and definitive religion.

Al-Shāfi'ī discusses briefly the place of the Qur'an in the Islamic religion and the duty of the Muslims to obey the orders of the Prophet, and concludes that it is the duty of all those who seek legal knowledge to gain it by constant appeal to God's Book as communicated to the Prophet. For "no misfortune will ever descend upon any of the followers of God's religion for which there is no guidance in the Book of God to indicate the right way."<sup>3</sup>

The Qur'an, al-Shāfi'ī points out, is the basis of legal knowledge. Its provisions constitute a "perspicuous declaration" (Qur'an, 3:132) on all matters, spiritual and temporal, which men are under obligation to observe. The second chapter of the *Risālah* is therefore devoted to a discussion of the nature of the legal provisions of the Qur'an under the title *al-bayān* (perspicuous declaration). *Al-bayān*, al-Shāfi'ī says, "is a collective term" which includes general principles of law as well as detailed rules. The term *al-bayān* has been discussed by several leading jurists. Some say that it merely means a declaration, embodying certain legal provisions; others argue that it not only declares them, but also makes them clear. Al-Shāfi'ī, however, seems to emphasize the legal content of the provisions on the grounds that all Qur'anic communications are clear, "although some are more sharply clarified than others," and only to those who are ignorant of the Arab tongue do some communications seem less clear than others. He then divides *al-bayān* into five categories. The first consists of a specific legal provision in the text of the Qur'an, such as the basic duties that are owed to God (credal witness, prayer, payment of alms, fasting, and pilgrimage). The second includes certain provisions, whose modes of observance are specified by an order of the Prophet Muḥammad (such as the number of prayers each day and the amount of alms to be paid). The third consists of broad legal provisions which the Prophet particularised. The fourth includes all the legal provisions laid down by the Prophet in the absence of a specific Qur'anic text.

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3. cf. Qur'an, 14:1; 16:46; 16:91; and 42:52.



The fifth and final category is comprised of rules which are sought by the exercise of *Ijtihād* (personal reasoning) by means of *Qiyās* (analogy).

Although in his chapter on *al-bayān* al-Shāfi'ī discusses certain characteristics of the Qur'an, that chapter is, apparently, intended to be only an introduction to a fuller treatment of the Qur'an, from a juridical viewpoint, in subsequent chapters. At the end of chapter II, on *al-bayān*, he discusses the Arabic eloquence of the Qur'an — one of its distinguishing features — which, to the Muslims, is the chief evidence of the miracle (*i'jāz*) of this Book.

Al-Shāfi'ī's critical study of the Qur'an from a juridical viewpoint led him to the keen observation that the Qur'anic rules and principles fall into various categories. To begin with, he divides them into general and particular rules. Some of the general rules, he observes, are intended to be general, in which the particular rules are included. There are general rules in which both the general and particular rules are included, and there are general rules which are intended to be particular rules.

Then al-Shāfi'ī divides the Qur'anic legislation into a different set of categories. There are, he observes, general rules the meaning of which may be clarified by the context, and there are those only the wording of which indicates the implicit meaning. There are general rules, he adds, which only the Sunnah can specify as general or particular.

Al-Shāfi'ī's classification of the Qur'anic legislation into the foregoing categories was not only novel but was hailed as a great contribution to the understanding of the Qur'an as a source of law. His distinction between the general, which embodies general rules and principles of law, and the particular, which means specific rules, clarified for his contemporaries the way toward a deeper understanding of the sources and principles of Islamic law. Al-Shāfi'ī's contribution elicited high praise. To cite but one example, al-Karābīsī told Ahmad b. Hanbal — founder of another school of law — that he had understood the precise meaning of the Qur'an

only after he had read the *Risālah*.<sup>4</sup>

Al-Shāfi'ī's specific reference to the Sunnah, the Prophet's sayings and decisions, to clarify the meaning of a particular piece of Qur'anic legislation or an ambiguous text, brings the Sunnah into the field of Islamic legislation and indicates its specific role as a source of law. It is in his discussions of the Sunnah and traditions that we find one of al-Shāfi'ī's greatest contributions to Islamic jurisprudence. For although the school of tradition laid sufficient emphasis on the Sunnah, in opposition to the school of opinion, in which al-Shāfi'ī himself took an active part in his early career, it was al-Shāfi'ī who made it clear that only an authentic tradition from the Prophet is binding and constitutes an authoritative source of legislation. Both the Hijāzī and the Iraqi jurists often accepted traditions that were based on local custom or embodied a personal opinion as valid for legislation. Al-Shāfi'ī made a distinction between an authentic tradition from the Prophet and a narrative which embodies the opinion of a Companion or a leading jurist; the latter may be useful in clarifying the meaning of a text, but it should not be as binding as a tradition from the Prophet.

Al-Shāfi'ī goes on, in the following chapters, to discuss the principle of abrogation, by virtue of which a Qur'anic communication was repealed by a later one. Here he indicates again the role of the Sunnah in its relation to the Qur'an, pointing out that the Sunnah merely states which of the Qur'anic communications are the abrogating ones and which are the abrogated, but he rejects the Hanafī doctrine which states that the Sunnah can abrogate the Qur'an. The Qur'an does not abrogate the Sunnah directly nor does the Sunnah abrogate the Qur'an; the Prophet, says al-Shāfi'ī, always provided a new Sunnah, in conformity with Qur'anic legislation, when the Qur'anic legislation contradicted an earlier Sunnah. Thus although he stresses the significance of the Sunnah, he gives it a precise definition as a second authoritative source of law in its relation to the Qur'an.

The Sunnah includes the Prophet's sayings and decisions. It is,

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4 Ibn Abī Hātim al-Rāzī, p.57; al-Fakhr al-Rāzī, p.20.

therefore, not on the same level as the infallible Qur'anic communications. However, al-Shāfi'ī argues, God had imposed on men the duty of obedience to His Prophet as well as to Him, and he goes on to give evidence that God regards disobedience to the Prophet as disobedience to Him. Accordingly, in practice the Sunnah of the Prophet is a source of legislation as valid as the Qur'an.

But since al-Shāfi'ī emphasizes the rule that only an authentic Sunnah, transmitted by reliable authorities, constitutes a valid source of law, he devotes a large portion of the *Risālah* to a study of what constitutes an authentic tradition, who are the reliable transmitters, and why certain authentic traditions are contradictory to one another. This latter category, to which he pays attention, is as novel as his distinction in the Qur'anic legislation between the general and particular.

To al-Shāfi'ī there are no contradictory traditions. They appear contradictory only to those who do not know the circumstances in which they were laid down and who do not realise that certain traditions merely qualify others. Al-Shāfi'ī's contribution to this field of legal reasoning, although it may raise certain doubts as to the historical evidence of his interpretation, resolved a serious problem for the jurists who were faced with a great mass of contradictory traditions. Al-Shāfi'ī's method of reconciliation, called *al-ta'wīl* (interpretation),<sup>5</sup> encouraged the acceptance of many a tradition which otherwise would have been in danger of being rejected. Thus his solution supplied further material for legal development, but for the critical historian it rendered more difficult the problem of separating the historical elements from the mass of traditions which Muslim publicists accepted without question.

The latter part of the *Risālah* deals briefly with *Ijmā'* (consensus), *Qiyās* (analogy), *Ijtihād* (personal reasoning), *Istihsān* (juristic preference), and *Ikhtilāf* (disagreement). Although these are important jurisprudential subjects, al-Shāfi'ī devotes much less space

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5. *Ta'wīl* became the subject of further study by many Muslim scholars. See Ibn Qutaybah al-Dīnawarī, *Kitāb Ta'wīl Mukhtalaf al-Hadīth* (Cairo 1326 A.H./1909 A.D.).

to them than to the Qur'an and Sunnah.

Al-Shāfi'ī's doctrine of consensus develops continuously in his writings. It begins as the consensus of a few scholars in a certain locality, following Mālik's method, and becomes a concept that includes the entire Muslim community. If the view that the new *Risālah* was written or revised as the last of al-Shāfi'ī's writings is correct, his doctrine of consensus as defined in this work should represent his final formulation. In various parts of the *Risālah*, al-Shāfi'ī refers to the consensus of the scholars as a method of expounding the law acceptable to contemporary jurists, but in his references to the consensus of the community at large, specially in the chapter on consensus, he undoubtedly tends to invest it with higher authority. Al-Shāfi'ī ends his chapter on consensus by asserting:

He who holds what the Muslim community holds shall be regarded as following the community, and he who holds differently shall be regarded as opposing the community he was ordered to follow. So the error comes from separation . . .

The concept *vox populi, vox Dei*, embodied in a tradition which states "My people will never agree on an error," is not cited by al-Shāfi'ī in this form, a fact which perhaps indicates that it was circulated after his time. But the concept does appear in the *Risālah*, which may well be the source of the final formulation of the principle embodied in the tradition ascribed to the Prophet Muḥammad. Al-Shāfi'ī's doctrine of the community at large was opposed by other scholars, including his own followers, although Ghazzālī (d. 1111 A.D.) tried to confine the agreement to fundamental principles, leaving matters of detail to the consensus of the scholars. The fundamental weakness in the doctrine of the consensus of the community was procedural — the lack of an adequate method which would provide means for the community to

arrive at an agreement.<sup>6</sup>

Al-Shāfi'ī discusses *Ijtihād* (personal reasoning) and *Qiyās* (analogy) at greater length than consensus, because he tried to limit the use of personal reasoning, in the wide and unrestricted sense, to the use of analogy. He often uses the terms *Qiyās* and *Ijtihād* interchangeably, but obviously he permits personal reasoning only through analogy. "Analogy is of two kinds," says al-Shāfi'ī, "the first, if the case in question is similar to the original meaning [of the precedent] . . . The second, if the case in question is similar to several precedents, analogy must be applied to the precedent nearest in resemblance and most appropriate." He tried, however, to limit the use of analogy to matters of detail; it cannot supersede an authoritative text. Neither should it be based on a special or an exceptional precedent; analogy must conform to the spirit and the general rules and principles of the law. In taking such a position, al-Shāfi'ī established a balance between those who used analogy extensively as a source of law and those who rejected it altogether. As to *Istihsān*, which the Iraqi jurists used as a method for rejecting one precedent in favour of another, it is declared unacceptable by al-Shāfi'ī because it permits virtually unlimited use of discretion and personal reasoning. Only one form of personal reasoning is acceptable to al-Shāfi'ī — analogy. Even this method is regarded as a weak instrument. In summing up the sources of the law at the end of the *Risālah*, al-Shāfi'ī says:

Although I have made decisions [on the basis of consensus and analogy] just as I have made decisions on the basis of the Book and the Sunnah, [in the case of consensus and analogy] the principle on which I made my decision varies.

Finally, the *Risālah* ends with a discussion of *Ikhtilāf* (disagreement). Although the jurists before al-Shāfi'ī seem to have

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6. The lack of a method by which to arrive at an agreement remained the perennial weakness of the doctrine of consensus, and no adequate solution was provided by jurists who came after al-Shāfi'ī.

tolerated a greater freedom in the use of disagreement, the trend toward the systematic use of the sources as defined by al-Shāfi'ī set in motion the movement to limit disagreement. Al-Shāfi'ī states that there are two kinds of disagreement. The one is prohibited and the other permitted. He goes on to say:

On all matters concerning which God provided clear textual evidence in His Book or [a Sunnah] uttered by the Prophet's tongue, disagreement among those to whom these [texts] are known is unlawful. As to matters that are liable to different interpretations or derived from analogy, so that he who interprets or applies analogy arrives at a decision different from that arrived at by another, I do not hold that [disagreement] of this kind constitutes such strictness as that arising from textual [evidence].

Thus al-Shāfi'ī restricts disagreement only on matters on which the scholars may exercise personal reasoning (*Ijtihād*) and on which each may take a decision which is right in his own way. A case in point is the search for the *qiblah*, the direction of the Sacred Mosque. Everyone will have to determine his own *qiblah*, by *Ijtihād*, and although each may take a slightly different position from another, everyone is right in his own way.



## INDEX

Apart from important names, only key words and concepts have been included in this index. Words such as Ḥadīth, Sunnah, Isnad, Prophet, Islam, Qur'an etc., which occur throughout the book have been excluded. As more than 300 titles have been referred to in this collection, most of them have been mentioned more than once, the inclusion of all the titles would make the index inordinately long. For this reason, the names of authors and books quoted in the Endnotes also have been excluded.

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